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CHRISTIANITY

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THE CHRISTIAN ADVOCATE'S PUBLICATION

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BY

HUGH JAMES ROSE, B.D.

CHRISTIAN ADVOCATE IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE.

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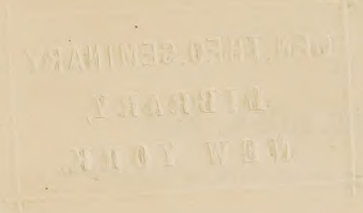
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TO
JOHN,
LORD BISHOP OF LIMERICK.

MY LORD,

I VENTURE to address this work to your Lordship, because I am anxious to record my gratitude for the kind interest which you have taken in it, and to enjoy the privilege of thus publicly connecting my name with one which, wherever it is known, is revered and beloved. Let me trust that your Lordship will pardon my boldness, in taking this liberty without your permission.

That your Lordship's life may be prolonged for very many years, in renovated health and strength, is a prayer which, in common with all who have the happiness of knowing you, I breathe from the bottom of

my heart. Nor is that prayer uttered under the influence of private feelings alone, but in the certainty, that, whatever portion of years and of strength it may please the Almighty Disposer of events to bestow on you, all those years, and all that strength will be consecrated to promoting His cause on earth, and employed in rendering to His Church all the service which can be rendered by lofty and uncompromising principle, by piety and by learning.

I have the honour to be,

My Lord,

With the utmost respect,

Your Lordship's obliged servant,

HUGH JAMES ROSE.

Cambridge, Dec. 11, 1829.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE will of Mr. Hulse, while it directs the attention of the Christian Advocate chiefly to such objections to the Christian religion, or natural religion as are ‘most modern,’ allows him, nevertheless, a discretion on this point, and permits him to write against any objection “whether the same be ancient or modern.” I have gladly availed myself of this permission on the present occasion, because as far as I have been able to collect, no persons have stood forward, very recently, as the *avowed* opponents of Christianity, whose characters or whose works give them any claim to consideration or reply.

The subject which I have chosen, viz. the objection made to Christianity on account of its want of universality, is unquestionably an old one ; but notwithstanding its importance, it has not been made, as far as I am aware, the subject of any separate publication. It is, I am well persuaded, one of the most usual as well as the most effectual arguments against

Christianity, and the reason is obvious. It is simply that the objection is capable of being shortly and pointedly stated, while every answer to it, whatever path it may subsequently pursue, must be founded on a comprehensive view of God's moral government of the world, a subject embracing many very extensive and difficult considerations.

In addition to my conviction of the frequency with which this argument is alleged, I had another reason for taking up the subject. One very important part of the answer to the objection has been almost wholly overlooked. I allude, first, to the difficulties which, from the condition of human nature, and of the world, must necessarily present themselves to the peaceable propagation of any religion, and more especially of a religion which is the unalterable enemy of all the vices of mankind; and secondly, to the difficulties which will present themselves from the interference of an overruling Providence, which will often warn, punish, and bring about great future benefits and advancement to the religion, by means which, for the time, act as serious hindrances to it. My meaning will be understood by a simple reference to the irruption of the Barbarians on civilized Europe.

The view taken of those difficulties, in the following tract, is the only novelty to which it pretends. Of course, in so brief a work, I can only give a sketch of the subject. To develope it fully would be to write an ecclesiastical History. I shall be happy if I succeed in directing the anxious mind to enquire for itself.

Since the tract was written, I have had an opportunity of consulting the works of two recent Church historians, those of the pious and excellent Neander of Berlin, and of Matter of Strasburg *. My views have been much confirmed by these works, and I have, therefore, in very many cases referred to them, rather than to the older writers, on whom those views were originally founded.

The reader who wishes to pursue the subject, will find very much that is valuable, in Bishop Law's Theory of Religion; in Dr. Parr's Sermon on the Fullness of Time, preached at Norwich, in 1780; and occasional remarks of value in Worthington's Essay on the Scheme and Conduct of Man's Redemption, in Edwards's History of the Work of Redemption, and in Watts's Ruin and Recovery of

* I refer to Neander's General History; and perhaps I should add that neither of the works alluded to is completed.

Mankind. I have found too, just as the work was coming from the press, that Dr. Chandler has treated of a part of the subject in his Bampton Lectures, and have been able, in the latter part of the notes, to make a few references to his work.

The reader will find in the Notes an abstract of the answers usually given to the objection to Christianity, on the ground of its want of universality.

CHAPTER I.

Ordinary objections to Christianity on account of its want of universality—usual answers to them—the question more distinctly stated—Inquiry what it is reasonable to expect from Christianity—Statement of the obstacles necessarily opposed to the propagation of all truth.

To the Christian, who is sensible of the inestimable value of that vocation wherewith he is called, there can be few recollections more fraught with the bitterness of regret, than that which recalls to him the small proportion of mankind who are made partakers of the same blessing with himself. He casts his eye over the earth, and laments to see in how fair and how wide a realm the Crescent triumphs over the Cross, or Brahma usurps the honour which is due to Jesus ; how extensive is the sway of superstitions, yet fouler and more pernicious, in themselves, and in their consequences ; and how vast the number of those, who barely own the notion of a superior Spirit, who are sunk in misery and ignorance, and little raised above the level of the beasts that perish.

If there be a thought which can compare with this in bitterness, it is that which arises from a review of the moral state of the Christian world. For it is a truth not to be denied, that, in the very

kingdoms which glory in the name of Christian, and among the people who call themselves the servants of a crucified Redeemer, the heavenly principles which he came to teach, that he might fit us for happiness alike in earth and in heaven, bear but a doubtful and an imperfect sway. It must undoubtedly be owned, that wars, bloody and relentless, rage amongst those whom he has commanded to love as brethren, heirs of the same hope now, and of the same home hereafter. It must be owned that, in Christian cities, vice prevails to a frightful extent. It must be owned, that, among individual Christians, the pure principles which their Master came to teach, are too seldom retained in the memory, or visible in the practice ; while, in public life, the politician still prefers the worldly wisdom, which bids him obtain the mastery, by sowing divisions, and by fomenting jealousies and resentments, to that Christian policy, which bestows on the peace-maker only the promise of a distant and a future blessing. Well, too, has it been said, that if they, who, in the early dawns of Christianity, expressed their wonder at the mutual love* of the disciples of Christ, could now wake from the dead, they would express, not only their regret, at the prevailing degeneracy from the ardour of a first love, but their wonder, that members of the same

* Tertullian Ap. c. 39.

society should entertain such deep and bitter feelings of animosity towards one another.

Yet the Christian's own sense of regret, at the narrow dominion, and imperfect influence, of the everlasting Gospel, is not the sole, nor even the principal emotion, caused in his mind by facts which he neither conceals nor denies. That such things are, he must indeed bitterly lament; but not for these does he question, or doubt, or murmur at, the decrees of a righteous God. He remembers that his Master commanded the disciples, who gloried in their miraculous powers, and in the conquests which those powers enabled them to achieve,—to glory far more, that their names were written in heaven *; to rejoice, that the inward gifts of the Spirit enabled them to achieve the victory over their own evil natures, and the body of sin within, far more than that the word of might from their mouth conquered the power of Satan without. He appreciates too justly the blessings which he enjoys from the scheme of redemption; he has drunk too deeply of the living waters of salvation; he has too often tasted the comforts and the consolations of the Spirit;—in a word, he is too sensible of the burthen of sin, and of the necessity and the blessing of a Mediator, to be removed from his own faith in the religion which he professes. But

* St. Luke x. 17.

he is grieved and wounded, when he finds that the limited extent of Christianity, and the vices of the Christian world, expose the cause he loves to the reproach or the contempt of infidelity ; which here takes up a position which it deems impregnable. The infidel has in vain attempted to deny the facts on which Christianity is founded, because their falsehood would involve the loss of all ancient history ; and yet more vainly has he attempted to elude the force of that internal evidence, which establishes the admirable adaptation of Christianity to the Being to whom it is addressed, and which proves of a surety, that its Author “knew what was in man *.” But, in addressing himself to this quarter, he seems to find a point of defence in some of the best and brightest attributes of his Maker, and a steady, though it may be a reluctant ally, in some of the most pious and devout feelings of the human heart. It is the limited extent of Christianity, on which he builds his palmary argument. He begins his assault, with a loud and vehement profession of his belief in a God, the Father and Creator of all mankind ; and with the expression of his sincere conviction, that, in the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, there dwell, in union with every other perfection which the feeble mind of man can picture to itself, a love as bound-

* St. John ii 25.

less as the universe, and a justice as clear and as unsullied as the morning light. It undeniably results, he argues, from these premises, that the great Father of the universe beholds all his creatures with a father's love; that every real blessing sent by God to his creatures must be sent to *them all*; that he who bestows the rain and the sunshine alike on the just and on the unjust, will bound his spiritual gifts by no narrower limit, than the limit of the creation; that wheresoever man, the weak, the sinful, and the ignorant exists, there exists, also, in its fullest exercise, the plenteousness of the riches of the divine mercy and goodness.

But neither is this all: the unbeliever alleges against the religion by whose name we are called, that it professes not only to be excellent, but to be divine, and, like its Author, to have "come forth from God *." If these lofty pretensions were founded in truth, could it be possible, he asks, that, after the lapse of almost two thousand years, a divine religion should still reign with so contracted and so feeble a sway; that only a few nations of the earth should know its name; that so large a portion of those who are aware of its excellence should esteem it so little, and disregard its threats and its sanctions, alike in their public transactions, and in the retirement of

* St. John xvi. 30.

their private lives *? These, I say, have been, these are, the favourite arguments of the unbeliever; and they who, in the exercise of the endearing ties of friendship, or the intercourse of daily life, have been compelled to mourn over the prevalence of unbelief, have observed how often it draws its most fatal and most unerring weapons from this source.

In answer to these objections, much argument of the soundest description has been offered, to which we need only briefly advert. In reply to the first argument of the unbeliever, that this partial distribution of the blessing of light and knowledge is inconsistent with the justice of God, reference has been made to the analogy of nature: in which we discover a system of beneficence, but not of optimism; and in which we clearly see, that God bestows his gifts of health and strength, of capacities and means for improvement, with the most promiscuous variety.

He who might think it hard that gifts of an intellectual and moral nature should be thus denied to some, and bestowed on others, has been reminded, that, on the one hand, on the supposition of a moral Governor of the world, all will be equitably dealt with at last, and no more required of any one than

* A fuller Statement of these several objections will be found in the Notes and Illustrations to this Chapter, No. 1.

might be justly expected of him from the circumstances in which he was placed; and that, on the other, as a system implies variety, the difference of physical constitution, of education, and of circumstances, must, without the constant and direct interference of Providence, ever produce wide and momentous differences in the spiritual advantages of mankind, and thus give the same opportunities for cavil and objection to the unbeliever. Yet further, it has been argued that we do not know the whole of the case; and that our present state, for example, may possibly be the consequence of something past, of which we know nothing. Besides which, the apparent imperfections in the system of religion which we profess, are of signal use as a trial of men's minds; giving scope for a virtuous exercise, or vicious neglect, of their understanding, in examining or not examining the evidence offered them*.

I deem it wholly unnecessary to do more than advert to those well-known arguments. There can, I think, be little doubt, that, in the eye of candour and of reason, they would be sufficient to defend the moral government of the world, with respect to the limited extent of revelation, on the supposition, that the facts assumed on the one side, and admitted on the other, were rightly assumed, and

* I need hardly say that I am using the words of Bishop Butler.

rightly admitted. If Christianity *had* remained for centuries without increase; nay, if it were to increase no more, these arguments, standing as they do, on a base that cannot be shaken, would ever satisfy the candid inquirer. He, indeed, who should acknowledge the weight of the evidences of a revelation; who should perceive its adaptation to the wants, the wishes, the passionate longings and fears of human frailty; who should feel its powerful energies operating on his own heart; who should remember how little, at best, man can know of the dispensations or dealings with God,—and yet, should reject a revelation, because not offered to all, would act on principles, which he could not carry into common life, without incurring the imputation of folly or madness.

But it would seem, on a nearer view of the case before us, that the facts are not entirely as they have been assumed and admitted to be; and that our holy religion *must* submit to be tried by a somewhat stricter and severer test. For, although a holy and righteous God might have the strongest reasons for withholding from one part of his creation that heavenly light which “makes a sunshine in the shady place,” and spreads a blessing wheresoever it shines; and though He might most equitably bestow his best and choicest gifts on a portion, only, of that universe, which is, alike in all its parts, the work of his Almighty hand,—yet the advocate of revelation must

admit,—rather not admit, but exultingly proclaim, that the revelation vouchsafed to us Christians, contains promises and prophecies of its own universal extent and dominion. These promises and prophecies, indeed, are scattered through the book of life with no sparing hand, but greet us with their delightful voices on every side ; and cold must be that heart, and insensible that spirit, which does not often turn with a trembling and almost feverish exultation, from the ‘dreary intercourse of daily life,’—from the present, where the Redeemer reigns with a divided sway over careless and worldly hearts, to the future, where his throne shall be established in righteousness, over a redeemed, a happy, and a heavenly-minded world. We must, indeed, rejoice to remember—the direct and glorious promise, that the light of the Gospel is to shine throughout the world ; the direct and positive command, that every creature should be baptized into the name of the Redeemer ; the clear declaration, that it is the desire of the Father, that every knee should bow at that holy name, and that it is to his glory, that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord *. We have the sure word of prophecy to tell us, that the knowledge of the Lord shall one day cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea ; we have the ex-

* St. Matt. xxviii. 19. Phil. ii. 10.

press and clear promise and prophecy of Him whose word is truth, that the Heavenly Seed, which, at first, was like the least of all the seeds, shall grow into a mighty tree of shelter and of shade for the nations; that, though the little leaven was hid in three measures of meal, the whole shall be ultimately and visibly leavened; that, one day, there shall be one only fold, of those sheep which alike belong to the great and universal Shepherd *.

I am aware, it may be said and thought, that the interpretation of prophecy unfulfilled, is a task of too delicate and difficult a nature to be attempted with advantage, or even with safety. But, while the truth of this observation in the abstract is willingly conceded; while it is willingly conceded also, that any particular interpretation of the prophecies, any limitation of them as to time and space, would be not only absurd but dangerous; still, the sense and bearing of prophecy, in the main, is too clear to be mistaken, and too positive to be eluded. Howsoever, and wheresoever, the prophecy is to be fulfilled, it is, beyond all question, the sure word of Scripture, that the Sun of righteousness is, one day, to spread his glad and cheering beams over the farthest verge of the earth.

The question then, it must be allowed, is somewhat different in its statement, from that to which

* St. Luke xiii. 18—22.

the sagacity of our divines has given an answer ; the difficulty is of a nature somewhat different. It may, perhaps, with more propriety be thus stated. If Christianity really came forth from God, and if it contain a promise and a prophecy that its light is to shine on all, how comes it that that promise and prophecy are yet unfulfilled ? and that a religion which professes to be *divine*, should not at once establish a resistless sway over the consciences of individuals, and over the faith of nations ? If the knowledge of the Lord is ever to cover the earth, can it be Christianity which is to diffuse that knowledge, when, in so long a period, it has done so little, towards effecting the blessed and glorious purpose ? But yet further ; can it be Christianity which is the desired, the longed-for revelation from a gracious God to his poor and miserable creatures ? Can that be the true light, which is to enlighten every man that cometh into the world, when, for many centuries, it obviously declined in purity and in influence, and, in the middle ages, lost so much of its brighter character, and approached so nearly to the character of a degraded and degrading superstition ? When, in the words of a valuable and recent writer on prophecy, “ its dominion, wide as it has been in ancient and modern times, and in regions rude or civilized, has yet only shared the world with other powers of a

gross heathenism unenlightened, and infidelity unreclaimed * ?”

These are assuredly, at first sight, grave and serious questions; and, although, when further examined, their importance is diminished, yet they contain so much likely to produce an impression on weak and wavering minds, that they well deserve consideration and reply. I shall, therefore, endeavour to show, that the apparent importance of these arguments is derived, not from their intrinsic value, but from certain unreasonable expectations and assumptions connected with them, respecting the progress of Christianity. It is always assumed, that that progress ought to be great and rapid†: whereas there is nothing, either in Scripture or the nature of things, which can justify us, in expecting any, but a slow and laborious advancement of our religion; and a little reflection will show, that, though the leaven is to leaven the whole three measures of meal, it is doing a work as effectual and as necessary, when completing its salutary operations on one portion, as when commencing them on others.

The observations which I have to offer, will arrange themselves under two principal heads.

It will be my first business to show, what it is

* Davison on Prophecy.

† Notes and Illustrations to Chapter I. No. 2.

reasonable to expect from Christianity ; and I shall then inquire, whether those reasonable expectations have been fulfilled. The more important, however, of these questions, as regards the objections I have noticed, is undoubtedly the first ; and it will be my endeavour now, to set those objections in their true light, by pointing out the obstacles, which, in a world so constituted as ours, will ever be found ready to retard the progress of religious and moral improvement. The result of the statement will be, I think, a conviction, that, in considering the claims of Christianity, it is our business to inquire, rather, whether the tree of life is growing, than whether its growth has been rapid, or whether it has as nearly attained its full dimensions, as a hasty judgment may decide that it should have done.

First of all, then, let us examine what it is right to expect from Christianity, when regarded as setting forth a claim to be considered as a divine revelation ? For the greater share, of the perplexity of the believer, and of the fancied triumph of the infidel, would seem to arise from a mistaken, or rather an indefinite, notion of the influence of the divinity of the revelation in its progress.

There appears to be a tendency on both sides, to believe, that truth, if revealed by God, must, from that circumstance alone, possess an extraordinary

and unlimited power * of recommending itself to the acceptance of those to whom it is offered. Now, that the Almighty Ruler of the human heart might arm any truths which he is pleased to reveal, with these powers of winning or enforcing their own acceptance, is unquestionably certain ; but it must be remembered, that such powers would be in fact *miraculous* ; and that they would, therefore, supply a decisive test, which must, at once, have closed or prevented the argument. No real friend of revelation, however, would ever urge such a claim on her behalf, and no candid adversary can feel himself justified in requiring it †.

It is, clearly, not our business to inquire, what the Deity might have done, but what he has done. And when we inquire what he really has done, we find, that the view presented to our consideration by the advocates of Christianity is simply this ;—that God was pleased to make known to us certain truths concerning our salvation ; to support them, at their

* Erskine, after noticing the various ways in which men escape from the force of arguments brought against them, (as, for example, inability or unwillingness to apprehend them) adds, very justly, ‘ Thus it fares often with human arguments, nor do the arguments of God escape a similar fate.’ *Evidences*, p. 90.

† The reader will find in the Notes and Illustrations to Chapter I. No. 3. some powerful reasons urged by various writers, why Christianity could not be so well thus propagated.

first promulgation, by such departures from the common order of nature, as were sufficient to establish their truth and their divinity; and, afterwards, to leave them to work their own way, under his protection indeed, but wholly and solely by human instrumentality. It will not be supposed, that I speak here in forgetfulness or neglect of that assisting and illuminating grace of God, which will be given in return to prayer; and without which, as we can neither think nor do such things as be rightful, so we can assuredly neither perceive nor accept the great truths of the scheme of redemption. I speak not of any aid of a supernatural kind which may be obtained, but of a supernatural aid actually and necessarily attached to the truths of Revelation. I deny the existence of such aid; and, under that impression, affirm, that the truths of Revelation are not *in kind* distinguishable from any other truths addressed to the acceptance or rejection of the human mind. They are truths, not discoverable, indeed, by human reason, but yet addressed, like other truths, to human apprehension; though many of them, as they regard the operations of the Deity, must, like all speculations on that awful and mysterious subject, far exceed the limited comprehension of the human intellect*.

This, then, being the nature of the truths of Chris-

* See Notes and Illustrations to Chapter I. No. 4.

tianity, and these being the circumstances under which they were sent into the world, there can be no reason to suppose that the knowledge of them can be propagated in any other way, than that of other truths of a different nature. The superior importance, indeed, of the truths of religion, may ensure for them a greater degree of attention, as their own excellence may ensure for them a readier acceptance ; but these differences are, in fact, only differences of degree, and not of kind. If the truths of revelation, then, are left to find their way into the world, by the intervention of human instruments, it follows, at once, that we must expect them, in the first place, to be liable, in their course, to all the evils and disadvantages, which the imperfection, the frailty, and the faults, of these instruments can entail upon them. It would be unavailing, and it would be sinful, for us to inquire, why the Almighty Ruler of the Universe chose to make use of an imperfect and frail instrument ; why he did not proceed by other methods ; why his system was not different. But if it were not unavailing, and if it were not sinful, we may yet feel a moral certainty, that the full development of his plans would be made in vain, to understandings weak and frail as ours. In the particular case under consideration, all that we know is, that which the word of God hath told us, that the truths of Christianity are to shine one day throughout the

whole of creation ; all that we see is, that the Great Parent of creation has chosen man to effect his great and glorious purposes. It is obvious, then, that he who is inquiring, what it is right to expect from Christianity, can never attain to a just solution of the question, while he persists in considering only the high pretensions of the system, and overlooks, whether from prejudice or carelessness,—the imperfections of the agents, selected for its propagation. We do not expect, that the importance of the message will expedite its progress, when we are compelled to rely on the services, of an infirm, a tardy, or a treacherous messenger ; nor can we, while considering the progress of Christianity, leave out of our calculation, with any semblance of justice, the infirmity, the tardiness, and the treachery of man. We must remember, not only the brief span of human life, and all the changes and chances to which it is subject, but the instability of man's firmest and highest purposes : we must remember, to our shame and confusion, how the very purest and loftiest spirits have been seduced and polluted, by the temptations and the splendour of earthly ambition or earthly wealth : we must consider, how the best and most righteous plans have been frustrated ; sometimes, by failures arising from contingencies, beyond the sagacity of man to foresee, and beyond his power to remedy ; sometimes, by the baseness

and corruption of the agents and instruments themselves.

We must remember, next, that Christianity was not at once to transform the face of the external world ; but to take it as it was, and gradually to effect an internal amendment. No miraculous interference of Providence, was to put an entire, and eternal termination, to the ravages of war, the projects of ambition, and the schemes of avarice ; nor to pour the light of civilization and of knowledge, on the uninstructed savage. This consideration alone, would show, that a Revelation must inevitably be subject, and that in no small degree, to all the changes and chances, which attend the lot of man : that it must long be liable to injuries and retardation,—from the dispositions of the rulers of this world ; from the prosperity, or the desolation of kingdoms ; and from the ravages of barbarism. In the earlier stages of the propagation of a religion, more especially, the fate of empires, and the fortunes of war, must influence the fate and the fortunes, of the very revelation of God.

When due weight is given to these considerations, we shall understand, and admit without difficulty, that the progress of a religion exposed to so many hazards and contingencies, must, inevitably, be slow and almost imperceptible *. Yet more, shall we be

* See N. & I. ch. I. No. 4.

impelled to the same conclusion, when we look at the progress of truths, wholly unopposed by actual circumstances, and retarded, only by the incapacity, or the indisposition, of the human heart to accept them; when we see, how ages and generations of men wear away, while the prejudices and the superstitions which enthrall and enslave them, remain, almost, in the freshness of their first strength. Let us turn our eyes, for a moment, to the history of that nation, to which the earlier revelation was committed, and see, how many generations of obstinacy, of perverseness, of miracles, and of sufferings, passed away, before that truth, which would seem, of all truths, to recommend itself most to the reason,—the Unity of God—could be brought home to the hearts and understandings, of the rebellious people whom he cherished and protected; and before the very beings, who owed their existence as a nation, to his guidance and protection, could be prevented, from offering the incommunicable honours of the eternal God, to the beasts of the field, or to the inanimate works of their own hands. To assert, that the human mind is unable, in its present state, to accept, or even to apprehend truth, with ease and rapidity, is, I am aware, to assert a doctrine little acceptable, in an age when men are deluded to a degree, which, previous to experience, would have been incredible, by the wretched absurdities of a low and mechanical philosophy; and

when they are persuaded by it, that, because they are making progress in the knowledge of facts, their intellects also are fast advancing to perfection, and making rapid progress to the knowledge of all truth. But it is the law, the melancholy law, by which the society of the frail and blind race of man proceeds, that the progress of truth shall be slow, and laborious, and painful; long obscured by prejudice, long opposed by violence, and then only, triumphant, then only, universally acknowledged, then only, shining with meridian lustre,—when they who hailed its morning beams, are passed away and forgotten, yea, when ages have rolled over their graves *. And if this is the law, by which, even the truths that concern the worldly and temporal interests of man, shall alone make progress, have we any reason to hope, that the general doom shall be reversed, for those sublime and unearthly truths, to which man ever turns the ear of coldness and indifference? Can we hope, that it will be reversed, for that revelation, which does not soothe the fallen nature and heart of the being whom it addresses, by any flattering appeal to his power or his capacity; which tells him, that his heart is deceitful, and his understanding unable, without assistance, to discern truth; which, speaking

* ‘Revolutions of ages do not oft recover the loss of a rejected truth, for the want of which whole nations fare the worse.’ Milton, *Arcopagitica*, Works, Vol. i. p. 15. (ed. Birch.) See Notes and Illustrations to chapter I. No. 6.

with the voice of a master, demands implicit assent to the doctrine that it teaches, on the authority of him who reveals it ; and which addresses mysteries, deeper than had ever entered into the heart of man to conceive,—to men, who own no higher guide than their own limited intellect, and believe in no divine inspiration ? Shall passion die away, shall prejudice be put to shame, shall slander be silent, when the cause of the great Enemy of passion, and prejudice, and slander, is at stake ? Shall those holy laws which would bind down the strong man, be received by him in patient submission ? Shall the children of this generation go forth, with festivities and joy, to hail the triumph of her, who would banish ambition and sensuality, and riches and pride, from her presence ; who, in a word, would proclaim their shame and their condemnation ?

These latter considerations open upon us, at once, a field of the most extensive and important reflection. They lead us to remember, that the doctrines of the Gospel are not only to be taught *by* man, but that they are addressed *to* man ; and that God's holy and beneficent purpose, in revealing those blessed doctrines, is the amendment of man himself. Considered in this view, how serious an aspect do the frailty and the failings of the human heart assume ; what almost invincible difficulties do they present ! The hindrances to God's purposes, indeed, caused by man's imperfection as an agent, shrink into nothing,

when compared with the resistance offered to them, by his obstinacy as a sinner. Weighty, however, and important, as this consideration is, it is one, on which I feel it wholly unnecessary to dwell. It must, surely, be sufficient to say, that the triumph of Christianity is, in other words, the eradication of sin; and that they who complain of the slow progress and feeble influence of our holy Religion, must speak in forgetfulness of the power of the fearful adversary, with whom it has to contend.

But yet further : let it be remembered, that, while the immediate propagation of religion is entrusted to human hands, the great Governor of the world, who has sent it forth, and who desires its advancement, will so *mediately* direct the affairs of men, as to further his great purposes. Nay, we are indeed persuaded, that, in the words of a living prelate of our Church, “the whole economy of the divine government, whether it be viewed with reference to the character and fate of nations, or the fortunes and duties of individuals, is so regulated, that all the movements of the vast machine, complex and intricate as they may be to human eyes, are tending, in harmonious concert, or due subordination, to the fulfilment of that grand scheme of mercy, which was decreed before the foundation of the world*.” No other be-

* See the present Bishop of London’s Sermon before the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, in 1827, p. 14.

lief, indeed, than this, can be entertained, with respect to a *divine* revelation. Yet, if this *be* our belief, will it not at once lead us to expect many checks, many apparent failures, many heavy judgments, many grievous afflictions? The corruptions which human wisdom will introduce into the doctrines of revelation; the degeneracy from the first purity and the first love; the avarice and ambition, which assume the garb of religion, and carry on their own evil prospects of aggrandizement, under its sacred name; the indifference to eternal truths which will, of a surety, be witnessed in the progress of every religion,—these all, must be visited with a heavy and unsparing hand. It is punishment, and privation, and suffering alone, which call nations and churches, as well as individuals, to a sense of the duties they have omitted, of the corruptions they have introduced, and of the apostacy they have practised *. And it must be a vain and a carnal mind alone, which cannot see, in the affliction which follows rebellion or indifference, the tender mercy of One, who wounds only to save. Though “in a little wrath, the Lord our Redeemer may hide his face from his people for a moment,” it is in order that, “with everlasting kindness, he may have mercy upon them †;” that the “waste and desolate places, the

* See N. & I. ch. I. No. 7.

† Isaiah liv. 8.

land of destruction, may become too narrow, by reason of the inhabitants *."

Last of all, (and it is with this reflection I close the present chapter,) in the grandeur of a scheme, which is to comprehend the universe, and endure, for ever, in itself, or in its effects; and in the acknowledged and confessed inability of human wisdom, to discern far beyond the present hour, or to penetrate into the mists of darkness that conceal the future,—we may find ample reasons, for expecting much that will pain our feelings, and much that will perplex our understandings. Yet there is nothing new in this; nothing, which ought to excite either wonder or dismay. For, the brief experience of our own limited existence must have shewn us, how often, not only the best laid plans, have been subjected to failure, but the very objects we have warmly but ineffectually endeavoured to accomplish, have been effected, by means, which, at first sight, appeared most adverse and opposed to them †. While the strong men perish in the wilderness, in sight of the Canaan which they might possess, and of the enemies whom they might conquer, the little ones, who have no knowledge of good and evil, go in and possess the promised blessings.

* Isaiah xlix. 17.

† See N. & I. ch. I. No. 8.

And if this be true in the petty concerns of time, and visible even in our brief existence, shall we be vain enough to imagine, that the vast scheme of redemption shall be brought about by means, which will not defy our sagacity, and transcend our comprehension ? God is not, indeed, a man, that he should lie, nor the son of man, that he should repent. Hath he said ? He will assuredly do it. Hath he spoken ? Of a truth he will make it good. But His wisdom, and His power, are not confined to the narrow limits of means or of time ; nor is He concerned to vindicate his truth and his honour, whensoever it may please our folly or our frailty to demand it. He desires not to dress forth the mimic garden of a child, with plucked and broken flowers, that may feed a depraved fancy for a moment,—but to plant a paradise, whose everlasting flowers shall spring and bloom in deathless beauty. While, with a perverse spirit, we vainly question, or, in humble devotion, confidently believe, though we see not,—he is effecting his purposes in certainty and in silence. And when the vain questioner, and the devout believer, shall have been, for ages sleeping together in the dust, He, who is for ever the same, and whose years fail not, shall still in certainty and in silence work on. For, though to the feeble and short-lived race of man, that which is to be, only after they have long descended to the silence of the grave, may seem to possess but a

faint and feeble interest,—though we may vainly desire, that all the complicated changes of an universe, shall be effected in the space of an ephemeral existence, shut in by yesterday and to-morrow,—though we may think with indifference of the day, when the Saviour's name shall be owned throughout the universe, and the choral voice of his redeemed shall send forth one hallelujah of joy and of thanksgiving,—because that shout of extasy cannot pierce through the silence of the tomb, nor sound on the dull cold ear of death,—yet, to Him, one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. And that glorious plan, which he ordained before the foundations of the world were laid, he will accomplish, after they have crumbled into dust ; and a new heavens, and a new earth, shall spring up, and shall endure for ever !

CHAPTER II.

Review of the difficulties enumerated in the preceding Chapter—

*Appeal to history in confirmation of the view there offered—
persecutions by the hand of power, and by the populace.*

IN the preceding chapter, I endeavoured to enumerate the various impediments, which must necessarily attend on the propagation of any revelation, effected by human instrumentality. They were such, as would, indeed, appear wholly inevitable, when we consider, either, the order of the world in which the revelation is to be made, the progress of that revelation, or the frail and evil nature of those who are, at once, its agents and its objects. The brief and transient existence of man, the instability of his plans, the indifference with which he too often regards the good of mankind, or the base and unworthy objects which call him away from it, arise, in formidable array, on the one side; and on the other, are, the course of human events, the fall of empires and the fortunes of war, the slow and painful progress of truth, the inveteracy of prejudice; the open opposition of the evil; the coldness, or, at least, the slow apprehension, of the good. The sad procession is closed, by the corruptions which the pride of human reason introduces into the

doctrines, or which the baseness of human avarice infuses into the practice, of the best and holiest religion ; and by the tremendous but necessary severities, which its Author inflicts on guilty churches and nations, as a warning to others against similar pollutions of the Truth, and, consequently, as the best means of insuring its future progress and advancement.

These are evils, which, in a world like this, must inevitably be attendant on the propagation of *any* form of religion. They will prevent her most ardent friends, from expecting her to make any rapid advances ; and they ought to prevent every candid adversary, from hastily pronouncing against her the charge of failure. Neither are these, in the case of Christianity, the arguments of an advocate, to account for faults which he is compelled to admit, or to palliate reverses which he cannot deny ; nor are they the mere speculations of the thoughtful, imagining in their retirements what will be, but never turning their eyes to the busy scenes of life, or to the page that records the sins and the sufferings of humanity, —to see what has been. On the contrary, we may appeal for the truth of all we have said, and of yet more, to the eighteen centuries, during which the light of Christianity has been struggling, to emerge from the clouds of darkness that conceal her splendour, and gradually to reveal her beauty to the nations.

It now becomes our business to engage in this in-

quiry ; and, in illustration of our argument, to examine the obstacles which attended the early propagation of the Gospel ; and this will complete the first part of our proposed plan.

The field of our inquiry into actual facts will, however, be far wider, and will lead to consequences far more important, than those suggested by the remembrance of evils *necessarily* attendant on any Divine revelation. For, in addition to these *necessary* evils, time and circumstances *may* have the most important effects, in staying, as well as speeding, the progress of new opinions ; and it will be our business, to point out the actual effect which they have had, on the case before us.

The point, then, which I wish, at present, to maintain, is, that, when due regard is had to the instruments selected for the propagation of Christianity, and both to the inevitable and contingent obstacles to its progress, the page of history affords sufficient proof, that all has been done, which, under such circumstances, could be rightly or reasonably expected. But if this be true, the whole difficulties of the case will be reduced to one ; namely, to a difficulty in showing why the particular period in which our Lord was born, was selected by Providence for his birth ; a difficulty hardly deserving the name, in the estimation of those who admit a superintending Providence, even if our own weak and limited understanding did

not suggest many forcible reasons for the choice *. We should, therefore, be justified even in saying that the real question is, why the world was ever brought into a state so unfavourable for accepting the knowledge of the true God ; a question, which, connected, as it is, with the unfathomable mystery of the origin of evil, even the unbeliever will not require the advocate of revelation to answer.

We shall preface the view we are about to take, with a single observation, in justification of our line of argument. The Deist has, on all occasions, endeavoured to attribute the triumphs which Christianity has won, to secondary causes. To such causes, indeed, he has unhesitatingly ascribed even the rapid and marvellous progress which it made in the first ages ; but he has always forgotten to inquire, whether natural causes were not constantly operating also *against* it ; and whether, subsequently, they did not produce that unfavourable appearance, which he alleges as an argument against its truth and its divinity. He cannot, therefore, complain, if the same argument which he has used, when it supported his views, be brought forward to counteract and oppose them.

In inquiring, then, into the principal causes which have retarded the progress of Christianity, it is na-

* See Notes and Illustrations, ch. II. No. 1.

tural to advert, first of all, to the direct persecutions by which its professors were assailed. It is often said, indeed, that persecution rather fans, than extinguishes, the flame of religious zeal; but the maxim is not universally true, even as it regards human alterations or arrangements in religion. It is true, even there, rather of those persecutions, where the hand of the persecutor is weak and timid, than of those cases, where he is overwhelming in force, and fully determined to exert that force to the utmost *. No instance can demonstrate our assertion more fully, than the various success of the Reformation; which established itself effectually in some quarters, though assailed and partially oppressed, while it was entirely quenched in others, by the bloody and remorseless persecutions of the Roman See. It is needless to dwell on the causes which accelerated its progress; and which gave free course to the word of God in England and Germany, though persecuted and oppressed in both countries. It will be sufficient to note, that the bloody and remorseless oppression practised upon it by the Papal See, quenched the sacred flame effectually in Italy and Spain, when the desolate victim of conscience was consigned, in the stillness and solitude of midnight, to the waters of the Adriatic; or when crowds

* See N. & I. ch. II. No. 2.

of unoffending beings, of either sex and every age, were hunted, like savage beasts, by the military executioner, in the forests of Calabria*. But, besides this, to extinguish and to retard are different things; and it is to retard only, which, in the case of Christianity, we believe to have been possible. The counsel that is of God, cannot be overthrown by those who fight against him; although, in his wisdom, he may allow his adversaries some share of success. Many a time they may afflict his righteous cause; but they will not prevail against it. Beaten down by affliction, from affliction it will recover new strength, like the giant from the earth; and, either it will rise in redoubled lustre, or it will depart from the region which rejects the light, to spread itself in other lands, where it may be cherished in a more genial climate, till happier days. But for a time it *is* afflicted, for a time it suffers; and so it was with Christianity, soon after her first outset. Though the quick succession of monarchs †, and the consequent and constant change of policy, prevented the entire suppression of the Christian name, even in the imperial city, yet, can it be doubted for a moment, that the fury of a Nero, a Domitian, or a Decius, would, but too often, put the timid to silence, confound the wise, and destroy the bold and ingenuous worshippers

* See N. & I. ch. II. No. 3.

† See N. & I. ch. II. No. 4.

of Jesus ? The mistaken zeal, indeed, and piety of later Christians, have induced them to magnify the bitterness, and multiply the number of persecutions, as well as of martyrs *. But ingenuity has been far more perversely applied, in casting a veil over persecutions which actually took place ; and in diminishing the impressions, which they are calculated to make †. No one can read the page of ecclesiastical history, without feeling the force of the well-known argument, respecting the sufferings of the Christians in the apostolic age. Why these perpetual exhortations to constancy and to patience, if they were not called for by the pressure of actual and heavy afflictions ? Whether we peruse the writings of Justin, or descend to the age of Cyprian, we find, in each, the same just and reasonable remonstrance, against consigning the innocent to death and to torture for a name ; and the same assertion, that the Christians, though their cause was disgraced by apostatizing spirits, yet, in numberless instances, gloried to meet the torture and the death, which frequently followed the confession of the name of Christ ‡.

But the early Christians had to dread, not only the opposition of thrones and dominions, but the furious and sudden attacks of barbarous and infu-

* See N. & I. ch. II. No. 5. † See N. & I. ch. II. No. 6.

‡ See N. & I. ch. II. No. 7.

riated multitudes *. In calamities of a public nature, the evil was ascribed, by the popular voice, to their impiety. The early writers are compelled to defend themselves and their religion, by arguments, against the charge of bringing down the vengeance of the gods, on the nations who neglected them ; and it would have been happy for them, if no other defence than argument had been required, against these dreams of blindness and ignorance †. Of the many methods, in which persecution tended to repress or retard the progress of Christianity, some are so obvious, and have been so often dwelt on, as to require no notice ; but it will not be without interest for us, to turn away our eyes from the once celebrated seat of empire, to the countries then considered as barbarian conquests. That “where the Roman conquered, he inhabited,” is the just remark of one of their own philosophers‡; and the civil colonization of these distant countries, had introduced, if we may so say, a factitious civilization into them, rapid in its progress, and by possibility, at least, most important in its effects. The general use of the language of the conquerors, and the facility of communication between distant parts of the empire, would, indeed, have been inestimable advantages in the propagation of the new

* See N. & I. ch. II. No. 8. † See N. & I. ch. II. No. 9.

‡ Seneca Consol. ad Helviam, c. 6.

opinions *. But, where the conquerors were in military occupation of the country, no change of any real extent or importance could be effected, in opposition to their wishes. Had the Roman government, then, been friendly, nay, had it been indifferent, to the doctrines of Christianity, the Roman settlers might have sown the precious seed of the Word, far and wide over the rich plains of Gaul, and on the distant shores of Britain; and, in return for the earthly treasures, the liberty, or the wealth, of which they robbed the Gaul or the Briton, his Roman masters might have presented him with the pearl of great price. That, in spite of opposition or persecution, the truth, in some degree, insinuated itself, we may gather from the acts of the churches of Vienne and Lyons; which, at the same time, are a sufficient proof of the capability of these countries to receive it†. But, if we compare its progress here, with its advancement in those countries, which, though equally governed by the Roman arms, possessed a civilization long anterior to their dominion, and wholly independent of it,—we cannot fail to perceive the unfavourable effects of an adverse power, on the propagation of the Gospel. In those happier realms, to suppress the doctrine of Christianity, would have

* See N. & I. ch. II. No. 10.

† See N. & I. ch. II. No. 11.

been almost to reduce the country to a desert *. At the seat of empire, again, when a moment's cessation of persecution was obtained, there was a large body of Christians to take advantage of it ; but the pulsation, which might be strong at the heart, would be languidly felt at the extremities ; and time and opportunities there lost, would never be regained. The solitary Christian, who might have found his way into these distant realms, would be compelled to exercise his faith in silence and fear ; happy, indeed, if even in silence he could exercise it ; and alike unable and afraid to impart to others, the hope which he enjoyed himself. That when Christianity became the religion of the empire, it became also the religion of Britain and of Gaul, is unquestionably true ; but the time which was allowed it to strengthen and expand itself, was far too short for the effectuation of any great purpose †. It may, perhaps, be deemed visionary to conjecture, that, had an earlier and more effectual door been opened to it, its effect in elevating the moral habits and feelings of these northern nations, and their sense of its inestimable value, might have bound them in stronger ties of union, and inspired them with a more determined spirit of resistance to the savage hordes, which poured in on them when their Roman masters withdrew ; might have

* See N. & I. ch. II. No. 12. † See N. & I. ch. II. No. 13.

given them a yet stronger and holier incentive, than even “the infant’s eye, the wife’s smile, or the dust of them that were before them,”—to transmit to their children “the land and the faith which they had from their fathers*,” or to die in their defence;—and might, thus, have changed the face of Europe. At all events, it cannot be denied, that, by the hand of power or of persecution, and not by any fault in the religion itself, or its ministers, its progress into the northern countries, which owned the dominion of Rome, was stayed for ages and generations.

But the external circumstances of the Church were not the only, nor the chief, impediment to the progress of our holy religion. That religion, be it remembered, though it contains a specific for the evils of a fallen nature, contains nothing to insure or necessitate its application. We may live in a Christian community, and live in profligacy; we may live in a Christian community, and live in mutual hatred; we may busy ourselves about Christianity, but it may be only about its speculative truths, and not about their application to our practice. The pride of human reason may employ itself, in perverting what is plain, and in degrading what is above its reach, by its futile attempts at explanation; or it may be pleased to think, that it can perfect the work of God,

* Wordsworth’s Sonnets to Liberty, Pt. II. Sonn. 9. ed. 1815.

and, by its superior knowledge of what is in man, render the system sent to purify and elevate him, more valuable both in theory and in practice. Nay, yet further evils, baser in kind, if not more fatal in degree, may seize on the hearts and minds of the professors of a new religion; worldly ends may be concealed, and worldly advantages gained, by its profession, as soon as it is adopted, or even protected, by the policy, or piety, of temporal power. He who would argue, that the religion, which does not eradicate all such evil dispositions, must be false,—argues on the absurd and mischievous notion, that, when God deals with men, he deals with them as mere machines, and not as moral agents; and that he leaves them no power to reject the good, and choose the evil.

The mischiefs which I have enumerated, were soon, too soon, experienced in the Church of Christ: soon, indeed, too soon, was it agitated by discordant opinions, disfigured by earthly philosophy, and degraded by worldly motives. At this painful picture, we are now compelled to look.

Not only, did the Christians soon forget the advice of St. Paul, that they should ‘all speak the same thing*,’ but they alloyed the doctrines of the Gospel, with the dictates of an earthly and spurious philoso-

* 1 Cor. i. 10.

phy. Even before the eyes of the last apostle were closed in death, he had cause to mourn, that, already, many Anti-Christ^s and deceivers had gone forth from among the Christians *. The sceptical historian, indeed, with a strange and perverted ingenuity, which defeats itself, expresses his belief, that the success and the prevalence of various opinions in the early Church, though they constantly disturbed the peace, and too frequently disgraced the name, of religion, contributed rather to advance, than to retard, the progress of Christianity, by throwing its doors open wider for the entrance of various, and perhaps discordant opinions †. That Mr. Gibbon's hostility to Christianity, alone, led him to adopt this opinion, in its full extent, cannot be doubted. It requires only a very ordinary experience of human nature, to know, that mere increase of numbers never can compensate for increase of dissension; that, where differences exist in any society, its common interests are perpetually sacrificed, to the advantages or passions of the parties contending within its bosom; and that, they are ever more ready to struggle, for the petty points on which they differ, than to join in a hearty endeavour, for the advancement of those in which they agree. In

* 1 John i. 18; iv. 1; ii. 7.

† Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, ch. XV. p. 287, (Edit. 1820.)

this respect, most numerous and most fearful were the evils, which the Gospel had to encounter. It would be as impossible, as it is unnecessary, to enter at large into this wide subject. Suffer me, however, to recall to your memory, the leading divisions and heresies, which have torn the Church of Christ, and delayed the progress of the everlasting Gospel.

The first, and, perhaps, indirectly, the most enduring perversion of the truth, as it is in Jesus, arose from that perplexity, as to the origin of evil, which, from the very earliest ages, exercised the intellects of man. The fervour of oriental fancy had, from an early period, not only accepted the doctrine of two principles; but, had exhibited that doctrine, in a variety of details, fanciful and minute beyond conception. It was in the fatal school of Egypt, ever the nursing mother of superstition and heresy, that these oriental tenets had been engrafted on some, or, perhaps, on all the systems of Greek philosophy; and that a still stranger union was brought about, between this compound, and the Mosaic revelation. It needs hardly be said, that the disciples of such a system, were not likely to receive any more of the Christian revelation, or, indeed, of any scheme of theology, than suited their own views. The doctrines which they disliked, they unhesitatingly rejected; on the ground of possessing superior information, founded on early revelation made to the

patriarchs, ‘whose names they abused, and whose writings they pretended to possess*.’ It was the Gnostic party, indeed, who first invented the plausible, but pernicious, notion of an exoteric and esoteric doctrine; it was the Gnostic party, which first suggested doubts of the authenticity of some of the books of sacred writ; and it was the Gnostic party, which first introduced the miserable substitutes for those books, which are offensive alike to sense, to taste, and to decency. Divided among themselves, they failed to do all the harm to Christianity which might have been expected: but there is sufficient reason, to lament the mischief effected by the swarm of heresies, which arose from the bosom of Gnosticism, and which spread themselves through all the churches of Asia and Africa,—bringing in their train, now the most debasing superstitions, and now the most extravagant excesses of ascetic rigour. If there be any, who undervalue the effects produced by speculative errors;—who doubt the overwhelming evil which must arise to the cause of truth, from the admixture of error,—let them, at all events, remember, that, in many of the Gnostic sects, a corrupted practice, was the consequence, or the companion, of a corrupted doctrine; and, that, it is the express testimony of S. Irenæus and of Justin Martyr, that,

* Gibbon.

very many of the heathens, were unable to distinguish, between the true and the false members of the Christian body; and were thus taught, by the just hatred which they had conceived for the falsehoods and abominations of the Gnostics, to turn away from the truths of the Gospel. We have it also, from unquestionable authorities, that the fanatical eloquence, the learning, and the show of piety, among the Gnostics, were effectual means of seducing but too large a portion of Christians, unable to combat the sophistry, or to detect the falsehood, which lurked under these disguises*.

On the consideration of these strange opinions, these mischievous and wide-spread errors, there is one reflection, which impresses itself, with irresistible force, on the mind, and which is closely connected with our present subject. It is the gradual purification of the mind of man, from long-cherished errors; and the extreme slowness, with which that purification is effected. That these strange dreams and doctrines, however mischievous, and however injurious, were, in themselves, less degrading, than the coarser superstition, the debasing idolatry, which they succeeded, cannot be denied. That idolatry, had borne sway for countless generations; and it could not, it would

* For proof of the various assertions made in the preceding paragraph, as to the Gnostics, see Notes and Illustrations to ch. II. No. 14.

seem, at once, give way to the pure and simple truth. It was enough, that some improvement should be effected; that error, indeed, should succeed; but error less widely removed from the truth. We look back with pity, on those who could submit to its influence; but let us remember, that they looked back with equal pity and with equal justice, on the errors of their forefathers*. But this is the slow and solemn pace, with which, alone, the truth is enabled to make the circuit of creation. Whatever may be the case of gifted individuals, the multitude will still move at its accustomed pace: and even the great, and the good, and the wise, will, for the most part, be held too fast by circumstances, to advance far beyond their fellows. How, then, can we be unwise enough, to listen to the dreams, that would persuade us of miraculous advances, to be made in a single generation; how, faithless enough, to question the truth of revelation, because the improvements which it effects, do not keep pace with our fancies or our desires? Though, in these latter days, the free course of the Word is not impeded, by the dreams of a Cerinthus or a Valentine, the eye of experience may still discern enemies enough, to restrain and repress its progress; and ages may yet elapse, before the errors and corruptions, which still defile the face of Christianity,

* See N. & I. ch. II. No. 15.

and disgrace the name of Christian, may be exhausted and purified. Let the Christian, only, be careful to remember, that, with every age, and every falsehood, that passes away, there arises a proportionate call on him, for a life corresponding to a clearer light. Happy, indeed, are we, who live in an age, when, at least, the coarser and fouler forms of falsehood and superstition have fled from the light: but most unhappy, yea, of all men most miserable,—if we voluntarily adopt errors, which cannot be defended by the feelings or belief of mankind at large; or if, when the light shines more clearly upon us, it produces no corresponding effect on our practice, no visible change in our lives.

In the age of which we have been speaking, little had been done, towards exhausting the errors of false philosophy; and, in consequence, no opinions seem to have been too wild, to obtain belief and acceptance. When even the orthodox party, were induced, by a false philosophy, too easily working on the pride of human reason, to admit the fatal notion of an esoteric doctrine; and to adopt, at least, the language, and extol the merit, of the Pagan philosophy*,—can we wonder, that wavering and ignorant men should have been led astray, by the bold assertions, the extravagant pretensions, and the fanciful

* See N. & I. ch. II. No. 16.

dreams, of the various heresiarchs? Can we wonder, that even the dreams of the weak, and, perhaps, insane Montanus, which could beguile a Tertullian, should seduce numberless ignorant men; and give birth to a sect, which, spreading itself over the face of Christendom, was not totally extinct even in the fifth century *? When the earlier years of even an Augustine, were betrayed into the errors of Manichæism, can we wonder, at the firm and lengthened hold which that pernicious heresy gained, on minds, less acute in detecting errors, and less resolute in investigating the truth †? When we know that the Pagan philosophy busied itself perpetually, in vain researches into the nature of the great Infinite, and that that philosophy was warmly extolled, and eagerly cultivated, by the orthodox and the heretic alike, shall we wonder, however we may lament, that countless errors, and innumerable sects, sprang up, in the vain endeavour to solve the mysterious doctrine of the Trinity, and in the obstinate rejection of that voice of wisdom, which says, “It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know §?” But, it were a tedious and an hopeless task, to pursue the tale of error and of heresy; to show, with what ingenuity the positive declarations of

* See N. & I. ch. II. No. 17. † See N. & I. ch. II. No. 18.

§ Job xi. 8.

Scripture were set aside, by men who would be wiser than God : to show, how the Sabellians endeavoured to explain, or pervert, the distinctions of Persons in the Godhead : how the Nestorian misrepresented the union of the Divine and human natures : or how many, with the Pelagians, fell into error in sounding the depths of predestination ; and vainly attempted, to reconcile the prescience of God, with the free-will of man. It is our business, rather, to observe the evils which these divisions caused to the Church of Christ : and, when the page of history records, on the one hand, the wide-spread triumphs of the Gnostic, the Arian, the Nestorian, and the Manichæan heresies, extending not to a single church, or a single city only, but spreading over kingdoms and nations ; and, on the other, presents to us the fierceness, the violence, and the obstinacy, with which these unhappy controversies were carried on ;—can we entertain a doubt, as to the mischief, the obstacles, and the delay, which such things must cause to the propagation of the Gospel ? Could the persecutor stop, in the midst of his unholy vehemence, and his wicked cruelty, to preach the gospel of peace, and his own condemnation, at once ? Could the persecuted rise, under the oppressive weight of the arm of power, and come forth, in safety and in confidence, from their hiding-places, to proclaim the triumph of the truth, by pointing to the dominion of falsehood ? And, even where the combatants

desired an unbloody victory alone, and contended with the pen rather than the sword, can we not learn, from the experience of times nearer to our own, yea, from the experience of our own day, what a false and overweening share of attention, petty differences and divisions excite; and how fatally they prevent any cordial unity, against the everlasting enemies of the Gospel, the ignorance of the heathen, and the sins of the professing Christian?

But, it was not enough, that the whole head should be sick, and the whole heart faint, with divisions arising from a proud, but feeble, intellect. The cause of Christianity was disgraced and injured, still further, by the strife and violence of men, who differed on no points of doctrine; who united in the same faith, and the same worship; and yet, by some fatal circumstance, some transient occasion of difference, or some base contest for gain, or for superiority,—were betrayed into irreconcilable hatred, contention, and bloodshed. Such, to take a single instance, was the schism of Donatus: which threw the African churches into utter confusion; nay, which separated the greater part of that country from the catholic church; and, which expired, only, with expiring Christianity*.

But how many, were the evil men, the evil tongues, the evil contentions, which alloyed the happiness she

* See N. & I. ch. II. No. 19.

might have enjoyed, in that time of comparative knowledge and civilization; and which obscured the fair light of Christianity, in sad anticipation, as it would seem, of the darker night impending, in the degrading superstitions of the Roman church, in the triumphs of the barbarians on the one side, and of the crescent on the other !

Nor must we leave out of our calculation, the necessary defects, which, in an imperfect world, ever attend on the best and wisest measures. As early as the second century, the Christian church was endeavouring to gather strength by union and concentration ; and had gone far, in laying the foundations of an ecclesiastical polity. Now, I refer, only, to, acknowledged principles of human nature and human imperfections, when I say, that with establishment and fixed system, comes, not, indeed, either positive inability or unwillingness to make progress,—but a tendency, at least, to quiescence ; or, to speak more justly, a necessary direction of the attention to what is near, and will be heard, rather than to what is afar off, and does not press its claims to attention*. But, when, with solidity and strength came riches ; and, yet more, when power consolidated the strength, and insured the riches,—all the baser passions of man were, not enlisted on the side of Christianity, but,

* See N. & I. ch. II. No. 20.

necessarily admitted within her bulwarks, to pollute, to debase, and to betray. Not that the genuine page of ecclesiastical history presents the same appearance, as the caricatures of the infidel historian, or the sneering ecclesiastic *. The martyrs and the confessors, were not all evil : the prelates of the primitive church, were not all proud, and deceitful, and passionate, and covetous. Far otherwise. The records of the primitive church present to us a picture, of suffering, and constancy, and courage, and self-devotion, which can be equalled by no history besides, since the creation of the world. But the picture is, undoubtedly, the picture of humanity : its beauty is debased, by that sad admixture of infirmity and evil, which characterizes the history of man ; but, though the voice of truth may be saddening, and depressing, yet it is neither harsh nor grating to the ear of faith †.

It is undoubtedly true, that, as Christianity gained strength, the children of this world were, more and more, ready to form alliances with her ; in which all that they gained, from the fountain whence they might have drawn the pure water of life, was wealth and honour ; and all that she obtained, was evil and disgrace. We, undoubtedly, do find, and find too soon, evil-minded, and worldly, and rapa-

* See N. & I. ch. II. No. 21.

† See N. & I. ch. II. No. 22.

cious prelates and rulers in the church of God*. Nor does the undeniable fact invalidate, in any way, the claim to the providential guardianship of God, over the Christian church. He gave, indeed, the seed of life; but its culture was left to human hands: it was to be propagated, and established, by human means; by that mixture of good and evil, which is ever found in man. In a word, God was pleased to take the agents, which the world afforded; and not to create better ones. He could have prevented evil men, and evil passions, from interfering, directly, or indirectly, with his holy religion. With his own right hand, and with his holy arm, he could have gotten himself the victory. By constant miracles, he could have guarded, and propagated, and established, his doctrine. But he has chosen another way. He has given a divine seed: he has left it to us, to cultivate; sometimes well, sometimes ill; now neglected, now fostered with affectionate and anxious care. To-day, an apostle plants it, and waters: to-morrow, a worldling despises and forgets it; and the third day, it is trampled down, in some unholy strife, for temporal, and sordid, and debasing, ends. Yea, so it hath been; we avow, we proclaim it. We avow, that the church of God hath groaned long, and often, under the ministry of worldly

* See N. & I. ch. II. No. 23.

priests, and the dominion of worldly prelates. And so it will be. Base men will still approach the altar of God, with hands defiled by corruption, and with hearts that pant after gain. Even the shepherd's staff may still be entrusted with those, who will abuse it to lord over the flock, and to oppress it ; instead of leading it forth, beside the green pastures, and the still waters. And the dreams of fancied wisdom, and the pride of human reason, and angry passions, and worldly strife, have reigned, and shall reign, in the church of Christ, till the Gospel hath done its perfect work ; and till anger, and till all the train of evil passions, have fled from the presence of the clear and searching light of truth. But shall we, therefore, arraign the Gospel of Christ, or the wisdom of Him who sent it forth ? Shall we accuse the law, for the venality of the advocate, or the corruption of the judge ? Shall we charge the imperfections of man, on their remedy ; and the sharpness of the wound, on the balm that is to heal it ? Nay : rather shall we not say, that, unless the Gospel of Christ, were, indeed, the word of truth ; unless, indeed, it were under the vigilant eye, and protecting hand of God,—instead of the mighty increase which he has given it, it must long ago have sunk, under enemies without, and careless or pretended foes within ? These enemies have, assuredly, checked, and will check, and will restrain, the course of the Gospel ;

‘all these things,’ in the words of the patriarch, ‘are against us,’—for a time. But that is all : they may make the course of the Gospel slower, but not less sure. In these efforts, they expend their force ; and here, the proud waves of their little might are stayed. The cloud that veils the face of the sun, from the nations which he enlivens with his ray, passes away, and is dispersed and forgotten : but the orb of day rolls on, in his everlasting majesty. And, when evil ministers and rulers of the church of God, are gone to their own place ; when schism hath died away, and heresy is silent ; when the kings of the earth and the rulers, the proud sceptic and the scoffing wit, who have taken arms, against the Lord, and against his anointed, have faded away from the face of creation, —when they have sunk into nothing, at the bidding of that Holy One, who sitteth in heaven, and laugheth to scorn their furious rage, and the vain things of their imaginations,—then, the Gospel, whose bonds they have endeavoured to break in sunder, shall hold on its way, in its might, rejoicing. For the Son hath desired of the Father, and the everlasting Father hath given him, the heathen for his inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for his possession. His kingdom, is an everlasting kingdom ; and his dominion endureth for ever.

CHAPTER III.

Recapitulation—Second part of the Subject—Inquiry what Christianity has effected—Review of the state of the world when Christianity was introduced—Its progress through the civilized world, before it was protected by the hand of power—Effects of the Irruption of the Barbarians—Gradual effects of Christianity on them.

WHILE the Christian rejoices to remember, that he has the promise of Him, whose word is sure, that the holy religion, which forms his refuge and blessing in time, and his hope for eternity, shall, one day, be accepted with joy, by every nation of the world, and the distinctions of colour and country, shall merge in the common name of Christian ;—while he willingly allows, that the truth of the religion, which professes to convey the promise, must be tried by its fulfilment,—he yet has, too often, reason to complain, that the test is applied, with an entire neglect of candour and of reason. The adversary,—I repeat the observation, for it is most important,—the adversary asserts, that a revelation, because it professes to come from God, ought to make a progress as rapid and as certain, as the power of the Most High could un-

doubtedly insure to it, if, in his wisdom, he saw fit. The Christian has, too often, cause to wonder, that the friends of Christianity shrink, with a careless and unseasonable dismay, from the picture, which presents to them the actual state of the case; and forget to remind the gainsayer, that, though the seed is sown by a divine hand, its culture is left to human care, or human carelessness. They forget to remind him, that, all truth, addressed to moral and rational agents, must make progress by the same laws, slowly and gradually; patiently defeating prejudice, and triumphing over hostility and passion; often neglected, often forgotten, and often sacrificed to sordid purposes; partaking, in a word, of all the evils, which, a connection with a being so frail and so imperfect as man, must ever entail on the cause of truth.

It has been my endeavour, in the preceding part of this discussion, to point out the nature of these unhappy and necessary evils; and to exemplify them, especially, in the first period of the history of the Church of Christ; that period, I mean, which preceded the irruption of the barbarians. It now becomes my duty to turn the reader's attention, from the causes which prevented the religion of Jesus Christ from doing more; and to consider the conquests which it has triumphantly achieved, in spite of all these obstacles,—achieved, in spite of difficulty and opposition, at the price of incredible labour, fatigue,

and perseverance,—yea, often at the price of Christian blood, freely perilled, and profusely shed, in the cause of that holy Master, to whose service it had been pledged and consecrated at the font of baptism.

It will be my present object, to dwell especially, on the progress which Christianity has made in extent; and, after completing this portion of the subject, to direct attention to the yet more important topic, of its gradual progress in moral influence; and to point out, at once, its present operations, and its future prospects.

Before proceeding with this topic, however, it appears necessary to define the extent, to which it is reasonable to expect, that Christianity should have advanced in past ages, and should extend at present. It is a truth, which is proved by experience *, though rejected by enthusiasm, that the purity of Christianity cannot be apprehended, by savage ignorance, or by brutal ferocity; by man, in short, when reduced to the level of the beasts that perish. Christianity is not fitted, nor designed, by a gracious and benevolent God, for such a state of things; or, to speak more definitely, man, so far as we can presume to judge, was intended to be ever a partaker of the blessings of society and civilization. It is only the perversion and wilful rejection of God's gifts, which reduces man, from a

* See N. & I. ch. III. No. 1.

being, capable of knowing and loving his Maker, and of benefiting his brethren,—to a creature, raised above his fellow animals, only by superior cunning and superior cruelty. We are not wicked enough, far from us be the imputation, to depreciate or discourage the pious labours of many zealous Christians, among the savage inhabitants of continental deserts, or distant isles of the sea. We are not weak enough, in the vast variety of a system so complicated, to contend, that all who want the arts of civilized life, are alike degraded, or alike inaccessible to the sounds of the Gospel : but, speaking generally, we maintain, as a most important truth, that civilization must, at least, go hand in hand with conversion, if not precede it *. History, indeed, presents to us the picture of a vast body of converts gained, by accommodating the Gospel to their capacities, and by extending its pale wide enough to receive them †: it exhibits a barbarous army, submitting, at the nod of its leader, to the lustration of baptism, with the same indifference, as it would have entered into the pollutions of any false religion ‡. But, in either case, it were vain to argue, that such converts were, in reality, Christians; vain, in a word, to expect, that men can be Christians and barbarians at once.

* See N. & I. ch. III. No. 2. † See N. & I. ch. III. No. 3.

‡ See N. & I. ch. III. No. 4.

With this limitation, then, we are willing, that the truth of Christianity shall be tried, first of all, by its general prevalence, in the ages preceding the irruption of the barbarians. We are willing to resign all the advantage, which, in argument, we might fairly claim, from alleging, that, in looking, as we must look, to the *final* establishment of Christianity,—its success, in a condition of society so soon to vanish away, is no fair object of examination*. We will allow, that, if Christianity were offered to the notice of an enlightened, though a Pagan world ;—and if, in that world, living in a form of organized society, and with some, though not with an adequate, knowledge and sense of moral obligations,—it found no acceptance from the wisdom of philosophy, the research of learning, or the splendour of power ; if, turning from these proud mansions, it were equally spurned from the humble abode of the poor and the unprejudiced ; if, I say, it made progress with no class,—undoubtedly, the argument from the external state of the religion, so far as it availed, would be against us. It might still be true ; for God might have reasons, far beyond our puny powers to descry, or even to comprehend, for allowing mankind to

* The early success of the gospel, however evanescent, might, to be sure, influence its progress in the subsequent order of things ; and, with this object in view, the examination would be quite legitimate.

harden their hearts against the truth, for a season ; but we could not then allege its acceptance, as a proof of his protection, or of its veracity. But, if we can show, that the reverse of this picture is, in fact, the case ; that, whether fully received by a prejudiced world, or fully practised by a corrupt one, its mild sway was hailed and acknowledged in the ancient world, so far as civilization extended, and as power did not interfere to suppress it ; that its progress was stayed, only by the barrier of barbarism ; that its holy flame ceased to burn, only where fuel was denied it ;—then, indeed, the ridicule and contempt with which the worldly-wise regard, what they deem, the credulity of the Christians, must fall with greater justice on themselves. The argument, with which they have sought to confound us, becomes, when the basis on which it rests is strictly examined, an argument not against us, but in our favour. And they will be reduced, either to deny notorious facts, or to get rid of an argument for the truth of Christianity, which, though not supported by the fullness of scientific demonstration, recommends itself to our reason, by those moral proofs, which the unperverted moral sense of mankind must ever accept. The facts are these. In a remote, and inconsiderable country, a religion sprang up, which, (whether differing from previous systems, in its peculiar precepts, very widely or not,) is, at all

events, entirely novel *, in its earnest endeavour to form mankind into one vast brotherhood ; and novel, too, in possessing a regular and systematic spirit of conversion, not in the ordinary way of migration or conquest. The people of that country were cut off from the rest of mankind, by their own prejudices, and by the contemptuous feelings with which other nations regarded them : they had no lead in policy, in commerce, or in arms. Their own religious system was, in many essential respects, very different from the new one ; and a large proportion of the people were inveterate against it †. When it escaped beyond the boundaries of the countries in which it first arose, it was frequently oppressed, and, for a long period, never protected, by the temporal power ; and was frequently liable to the sudden attacks of the multitude : it was injured, by internal divisions, among its adherents in general ; and by the admixture of false and injurious philosophy, among its more lettered followers. Yet, under all these great disadvantages, it had, in a short period, run nearly over all the then civilized world ; and became co-exten-

* This striking feature of the gospel scheme is powerfully set forth, in Reinhard's ' Versuch über den plan, den der Stifter uns, religion zum besten der Menschheit entworfen.' This work is translated into French by Dumas ; and is called ' Essai sur le plan formé par le fondateur de la relig. Chrétienne, pour le bonheur du genre humain.' Dresden, 1799.

† See N. & I. ch. III. No. 5.

sive with civilization, before the irruption of the eastern and northern nations broke up the existing order of things, and plunged the civilized world into a state of darkness, from which it emerged only after a slumber of centuries. If such victories be not deemed to go far in establishing the truth of the religion, its adversaries have, assuredly, to account for circumstances, wholly unparalleled in all their parts. But, what is more immediately to our purpose,—if the facts are admitted, with what face can our adversaries allege any want of universality, against the religion in its first period, unless they will avow, at once, their expectation, that Christianity was to change the face of the world by enchantment; and, in an instant, to transmute Tartary into Attica,—to convert a horde of barbarians, into a band of Christian philosophers * ?

We proceed, then, very briefly to notice the well-known facts, to a part of which, a frequent, and, as we believe, a just appeal, is made, for the establishment of a direct and miraculous interference in favour of Christianity, at its first outset; but to which we appeal, at present, only for the purpose of showing, how amply, the promise, that Christianity should make progress among mankind, has been realized and fulfilled. Not only was the world at large divided, at the first rise of Christianity, into two great portions, Roman and Barbarian,—but the

* See N. & I. ch. III. No. 5*.

Roman world, itself, was, we must remember, divided into two distinct parts. The one, consisted of countries, long enlightened by arts and learning; which had courted, or had been compelled to own, the sway of Rome: the other, of regions, which could boast of no other civilization, than that which the arms of their conquerors had introduced. In the latter class, were comprehended, not only our own country, but Gaul, whatever parts of Germany were civilized at all, and, in a lesser degree, even the Peninsula of Spain. Into these countries, undoubtedly, the light of the Gospel did not penetrate quickly or readily, for reasons which I noticed in the last chapter. It could extend itself, only through the Roman colonists; and they would be under the influence of the government which had established, and which protected them. The hostility, or the prudential considerations, which, as we see in the present day, so often render governments passively, if not actively, enemies to conversion, would clearly act as obstacles to the progress of Christianity in those countries; and will sufficiently account for the tardy and partial advances which it made. Though ultimately every where established, ere the Roman power was broken, it was undoubtedly established in some of these countries, at a later period, and only when temporal power aided the cause of Christianity*.

* See N. & I. ch. III. No. 6.

But, when we turn from these countries, to the happier regions where learning and civilization dated their birth, from a period far more remote than the rise of the Roman power, how different a picture presents itself! We have it from authority which cannot be doubted,—we have it, from *pagan* authority, that, in the rich and civilized provinces of the lesser Asia, within fourscore years from our Lord's death, such was the increase of Christianity, among every order and sex, as well in the cities as in the country, that the fanes of the idol gods were well nigh desolate, and their service consigned to oblivion or neglect *. It is on the *magnitude* of the evil, indeed, that the writer especially dwells, as an argument, with the government, against resorting to those severities, which his own humane temper led him to deprecate †. And, by a singular instance of good fortune, we are enabled to ascertain, that the spirit of Christianity there displayed, was no accidental nor transient spirit; for the same testimony is given, by another pagan writer, to the state of the same country, at the distance of a century ‡. In the lesser Asia, then, we need hardly pursue our inquiries; when we remember, that the parts of it to which we allude, were the most removed from the first scenes of

* See N. & I. ch. III. No. 7. † See N. & I. ch. III. No. 8.

‡ See N. & I. ch. III. No. 9.

the Gospel history, and the least distinguished, by the splendour or fame of their cities. The simple and unpretending annals of apostolic history, indeed, of themselves, teach us, that the sound of the Gospel had been heard not only in the streets of the splendid Ephesus, but had gone forth, to the ends of the distant and unpolished Galatia. If we turn our eyes to the learned and accomplished, but fallen and humiliated, regions of Greece,—to her ancient cities, or her more recent settlements,—there too, the zeal and the courage of the great Apostle of the Gentiles, had preached the glad tidings of salvation. The very buildings consecrated to the worship of Minerva or of Jove, had re-echoed the fervent accents, and witnessed the vehement eloquence, with which he proclaimed, to the philosophers and the people of Athens, the eternal truth of the unity of the Godhead, and the great mystery of Christian redemption. That the good providence of God, indeed, had blessed his earnest endeavours for the conversion of the heathen, would be sufficiently attested, by the Epistles which he has addressed to the churches, existing, as well in the very heart of Greece, as on her more distant shores. If we direct our inquiries still further westward, we find, that, even before Saint Paul had bent his steps to Italy, the imperial city possessed a church of no inconsiderable numbers within her walls: and, in less than seventy years,

their numbers were such, as to render them, in the public eye, and in that of a cruel and relentless tyrant, no unworthy object of jealousy and persecution *. Nay, it is the express testimony of the philosophic historian of these times, that there was a vast multitude of Christians at Rome, when the storm of the Neronian persecution burst upon them †.

If, next, leaving the confines of Europe, our hasty survey direct itself, to a country now almost lost in barbarism, what striking testimony does the earlier state of Africa bear, to the zealous efforts of the apostles or their followers, and to the protecting care of providence over the Christian religion? We have not the power of exactly determining, when it was introduced into Africa; but we have a melancholy testimony to the early existence of the church of Alexandria, in the heresies of which it was the fruitful parent ‡. But so rapid, and so wide, had been the progress of Christianity, along all the civilized part of Africa, that, even in the second century, there is proof, that a very large portion of the population, of one of the largest cities, were Christians §. And, if we descend to a later period, we find, that Christianity had spread itself over the whole face of the

* See N. & I. ch. III. No. 10.

† See N. & I. ch. III. No. 11.

‡ See N. & I. ch. III. No. 12.

§ See N. & I. ch. III. No. 13.

country; and that a regular system of ecclesiastical polity was recognized, in the various cities of the coast *. Nay, when the schism of the Donatists broke out, it appears, that above three hundred bishops separated themselves from communion with the mother church †.

But it is unnecessary to argue a point, so often dwelt upon; or to show the gradual extension of the Christian religion, whether through the various provinces of Spain or of Italy, or in its eastward course through Asia: for the object at which we are aiming, is not, in good truth, a matter of dispute. It is the express admission, even of the infidel historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, that the faith of Christ had been preached in every province, and in all the great cities of that empire, before the close of the third century ‡.

This admission is, undoubtedly, one of extreme importance. For we must remember, that, up to the close of that century, Christianity had not ascended the throne of temporal power. They who are the most inclined to rest on secondary causes as explaining its progress, and the most eager to extenuate the persecutions to which it was subjected,—must yet admit, that, up to that time, it had always been, at best, an object of indifference to the powers that be;

* See N. & I. ch. III. No. 14. † See N. & I. ch. III. No. 15.

‡ See N. & I. ch. III. No. 16.

that it had, at least *occasionally*, seen their persecuting hand lifted against it; and that it had, still oftener, been subject to the sudden and brutal attacks of popular violence. The adversaries of Christianity, then, can neither deny, nor conceal, the fact,—that a religion, unaided by power or by violence, and waging direct war with all the forms of worship practised by the wise and the great, wherever civility was known—was, within a few years after the death of its Founder, preached extensively, through three continents, and received by multitudes in every quarter; that, in less than three centuries, it had reached the extreme verge of the civilized world; and that, in the course of a fourth century, it had so entirely supplanted the ancient and false religion, that a Christian emperor had been able to suppress its public exercise, and the Theodosian code expressly states the conviction of the legislature, that the pagans had wholly or nearly disappeared *. Our opponents, then, may admit our inferences, or reject them, as they please; or they may endeavour to account for these facts, by some peculiar hypothesis. But we are justified, in first calling on them to consider, what difficulties the word *conversion*, as applied either to a nation or an individual, must, in all cases, imply,—and what difficulties and obstacles actually did present themselves, in the early history of Chris-

* See N. & I. ch. III. No. 17.

tianity ; and we are further justified, in requiring them, as men of candour, to declare, whether want of success can reasonably be objected, to a religion, which, from such small beginnings, became, by peaceful means alone, in less than four centuries, (during the greater part of which, it was rather persecuted, than assisted, by the rulers of the earth) — the professed religion of the whole thinking and cultivated world.

The unbeliever may, in his weakness, question the goodness of God, for allowing, any part of his creatures, to be lost in ignorance and barbarism ; any intelligences, to become unfit for the reception of pure and lofty truth : but he cannot allege, that the religion did not find acceptance, wherever it found hearts capable of accepting it. He must allow, that, in every case, time is necessary to diffuse the knowledge of any truth ; to overcome prejudice, and to struggle with difficulties ; and, more especially, in a case, where new opinions could find a foundation, only in the ruin of prejudices of the most inveterate description : and he surely, cannot, in candour, say, that, in the progress of Christianity, any time was lost ; or that less was done, than any reasonable estimate of the difficulties of the case would suggest.

But we must now turn to a widely different state of things : we must view Christianity, in what one may venture to call, her second period ; doomed to strug-

gle with difficulties of a far more formidable nature, than any which she had encountered before. So far as regarded her establishment among the nations of the civilized world, she had done her work. But far the larger portion of the world was still lost in barbarism. Nor was this the worst evil which presented itself, as an obstacle to the progress of the Gospel. The larger and barbarous portion of the world, set itself in array, against the lesser and civilized division; and, after a short and ineffectual resistance, overcame it. Thus, for a time, barbarism appeared to take possession of the civilized world; and darkness prevailed, for a season, against light. 'This, we presume, will not be alleged against Christianity as a crime. It was not her fault, that mankind had gradually deserted the light, which had been given them, by a gracious God, in earlier days: and that sin and ignorance had, at last, sunk them into a state of the most appalling degradation, of mental faculties, and of moral habits; deprived them of the benefits of civilized society; and made them, rather like the beasts of the forest or the mountain, than like the children of God, and heirs of immortality. In a word, it was not the fault of Christianity, that the larger portion of mankind stood in need of the knowledge of God, and of salvation: and, if it can be shown, that she has done all that could be expected of her, in bestowing that knowledge, it is not to be alleged, as a crimination, that much yet remains

to be done ; that the leaven has not yet leavened the whole of the three measures of meal ; that the mustard-tree, though advancing in strength and stature, cannot yet bear the birds of heaven to rest upon it.

It was very shortly after the entire and formal extinction of paganism, through the Roman empire, that its various provinces were visited by successive hordes of barbarians ; moved by an impulse, which, beginning in the remotest quarters of Asia, was felt to the extremities of the European world *. It would be as remote from my purpose, as from our proper topic, to enter into any historical view of the changes effected in the state of Europe, by this great movement : suffice it to say, that, although the countries thus overrun, never relapsed into entire barbarism, properly so called, yet they fell, immeasurably, in the scale of civilization and of knowledge ; and too plainly showed, in their manners, their vices, and their ignorance, that the better was overcome of the worse †. The ruin of literature, which, from whatever cause, had been long declining, was completed, by the settlement of the barbaric nations in Italy, in Spain, and in Gaul. The Goths, especially, viewed the arts of learning with contempt. The Latin language gradually disappeared ; and all access to the treasures of learning, was shut up, from all but

* See N. & I. ch. III. No. 18. † See N. & I. ch. III. No. 19.

the clergy*. The cities were comparatively neglected, by the fierce barbarians, who delighted in private wars, and established themselves, each in his own distant fortress †. All facility of communication, between distant parts of the same country, ceased ; and the disuse or contempt of the peaceful arts of agriculture, not only doomed some of the most fertile regions of Europe, to neglect and sterility, but took from the lower orders, all employments of a peaceful and regular character. It is painful, indeed, to the weakness of human nature, to compare what was, with what, it fondly believes, might have been ; and to see the civilized world fall back into darkness, ignorance, and cruelty. Yet, even here, the Christian mind may learn a lesson of the highest importance ; and here, assuredly, the believer may find ample reason for recognizing the fatherly care of God, in the steps taken,—at once, for protecting Christianity, from being overwhelmed in the common ruin ; for providing means, for the future civilization of so large a portion of his creation ; and for certainly, though remotely, extending the light of the Gospel, to regions and nations, then sitting in darkness, and the shadow of death. Whatever regret we may feel at the scenes presented to us, yet, even the self-sufficiency of human wisdom, will hardly venture to assert,

* See N. & I. ch. III. No. 20. † See N. & I. ch. III. No. 21.

or even pretend to see, that the salutary change, which has converted the whole of Europe into a Christian and civilized realm, could have been effected, by a quicker process, or by less costly means, than the overthrow of so much light, and beauty, and art, and civilization. Nor, on the other hand, can that wisdom deny, that the steps actually taken have, fully, and entirely, succeeded. But this is not all. For the prospect before us, presents, to the eye of the careful and candid inquirer, sufficient indications of an ever-watchful guardian, presiding over the welfare of Christianity. Such an inquirer cannot fail to perceive, that, had these great movements in the distant regions of Asia, taken place at an earlier period; had they occurred, before the Gospel had taken root downward, and borne fruit upward, the storms which successively burst upon Christianity, must, humanly speaking, have swept it from the face of the earth. Had they, on the other hand, come later, the corruptions, which the evil mind of man was daily introducing, into the pure truth committed to his care, would have effected a ruin perhaps equally wide, and equally fatal. These corruptions, too, let it be remembered, required a severe and monitory chastisement. When, within so brief a period from the first promulgation of a religion, which so especially inculcated peace and unity, and so strongly and earnestly warned its followers against setting their affections on the vanities of an evil world,—when,

within so short a space from the time, when holy men had promoted these truths by their example, and sealed their faith in them with their blood,—when, within this small interval, the followers of Jesus Christ were split into endless parties, and those parties were too often animated by a fury against each other, which would have disgraced barbarians fighting for plunder,—can the necessity for correction be denied, or can the ultimate advantages of that correction, to the cause of the Gospel, be doubted? When some of the leaders of the Church set the example, of violence, of cruelty, and of greediness for temporal power, and temporal riches; when, too often, the wild excesses of ascetic rigour were substituted, for interior holiness, and outward ceremonies usurped the place of the service of the heart; when the gold thus became dim, and the fine gold dross,—who will deny, that it required to be brightened, even so as by fire? who will deny, that the sins of man cried aloud for punishment? or who will doubt, that to punish, was, perhaps, the sole attainable way, to protect and preserve?

But the lessons of God to man, cannot be given suddenly, or shortly. The lessons, by which, an all-wise Governor of the world is to speak to the whole human race, for their good, in subsequent ages of this world, and in the eternity of the world to come,—must be inculcated by slow means, and must be of an ever-during character. He who sent Christianity into the

world, best knew, by what alternations of progress and apparent decay,—by what admixture of encouragement and chastisement,—this everlasting religion could be, most surely, and securely, propagated. It pleased him, when he held direct intercourse with one favoured nation, to warn, and to admonish, before the blow came. But it would seem, that, when he judged the education of his earthly family so far completed, that any visible interference of his providence was not needed, he left us to mark, or to neglect, as we might, the still and silent, but ever discernible finger of his providence ; pointing out to us, the same lessons, as the Jews of old repeatedly heard, from the voice of the inspired seer ; pointing out to us, that the corruption of holy truth, the self-idolatry of proud reason, the building up of strong-holds,—lead, assuredly, to ruin and to punishment. The Christian world, then, already corrupted, received, in the fourth century, from its divine Governor, if charity must repress the thought of a judgment, at least, a salutary lesson. And thus much, charity herself may venture to remark, that they who had sinned most, suffered most ; that from Africa *, especially, tainted with heresy, and torn by schism, the candlestick has been wholly withdrawn ; and that the countries, which had most defiled the beauty of Christian truth, were the first and the

* See N. & I. ch. III. No. 22.

readiest, to submit to the dominion of the crescent *. Whatever, then, may be our regret, for the depression of civilization and learning, we cannot fail to see, that the storm, which, by the permission of Providence, burst with irresistible fury, and destroyed much that was good, and lovely, and fair,—crushed also into everlasting ruin, much that was evil, and destructive to genuine Christianity.

Let us now, in pursuance of the plan marked out, briefly consider the work, which, after the irruption of the barbarians, Christianity had to perform; and what it has effected. As we pursue the inquiry, we shall trace the finger of God, silently but manifestly operating; his Spirit, moving on the face of the waters, and reducing the chaos, and confusion, and evil, by his slow, but certain operation, to harmony and peace. Where, indeed, can we find more convincing marks of his power, and his providential care, than in those dark ages, in which, without his blessed influence, the gloom which had gathered over the world, must have darkened into the thickest night, instead of brightening into the full and perfect day;—and where his power converted the very errors, which had deformed his religion, into instruments for its promotion?

Barbarians, as we said, had overspread the face of civilized Europe: and the first object was, to diffuse

* See N. & I. ch. III. No. 23.

and establish the knowledge of Christianity there. The good providence of God, ever educing good from evil, had been pleased to admit the barbarians, only by degrees*; at a time, when the Church possessed the aid of riches and power, and was held in reverence, and treated with distinguished honour, by the imperial government. It thus presented itself in an aspect, likely to enforce its claims to respect, with savages, who regarded only externals. The struggle, in a word, between barbarism and civilization, was not a momentary struggle. The barbarian did not overwhelm the men of former days, till he had been, for a time, in contact with them; and had, by that contact, imbibed some portion of their habits and their opinions. The leaders, from interested and secular motives, frequently assumed the profession of the religion of the empire, to whose honours they aspired; and the followers, were always willing to obey the chieftain, in a matter, which they evidently regarded with entire indifference†. But the miraculous legends,—the unhesitating invocation of supernatural assistance,—then resorted to, by men who thought themselves justified in advancing a righteous cause by pious frauds, undoubtedly tended to fix the religion deeper, in the minds of its new and uncultivated adherents. Even to them, some little

* See N. & I. ch. III. No. 24.

† See N. & I. ch. III. No. 25.

good was done; some deeds of cruelty were prevented; and the fierce and barbarian spirit was taught, that there was an invisible Being, before whom he must quail,—an Almighty One, whom he must reverence. But, whatever good might be done to our wild progenitors, who first received Christianity, the establishment of it among those, whose descendants are the inhabitants of civilized and polished Europe, was of incalculable advantage to us. As the barbarians spread, and settled in the various countries of Europe, occasions perpetually arose, when, in international questions, the clergy alone possessed the requisite knowledge and cultivation, and thus gained new strength for the cause they served *. But the clergy and the power of the Church, rose in the affections of the people, from other and better causes. They alone, were the defenders of the oppressed and injured. The Church was the sole, but the secure sanctuary, from the violence of the superior; and, at her command, during a large portion of the year, the truce of God proclaimed tranquillity and safety, stopped the flow of blood, and hushed the din of arms †. I do not speak in ignorance of the monstrous corruptions of the Church, or of the vices of the clergy,—but I speak only the sense of history, in saying, that, by them, and by the aid of the reli-

* See N. & I. ch. III. No. 26. † See N. & I. ch. III. No. 27.

gion which they taught,—was any thing of a better nature preserved, in the midst of habits and manners, eminently calculated to corrupt and degrade; any thing, which tended to tranquillize the turbulent, and purify the sensual. They were the salt of the earth; the sole conservative principle, by which Europe was preserved from the lowest and most brutal barbarism*.

Thus the leaven was at work; almost, it would appear to us, overcome by the large portion of meal, and seeming to lose somewhat of its own nature; but still working on; leavening the mass, by the mingled influence of religion and learning, so far as it was capable of receiving them. That the leaven, indeed, was, in itself, for the time injured; that the pure precepts of Christianity could not be fully enforced; that its members were too often influenced, by the evil and ignorance which they saw around them; and that numbers fell into corruption and ignorance,—all this cannot be denied. But, let it be remembered, that the voice of public councils of the church, even in that corrupt period, was constantly raised, to censure them for doing so; and that it was, in fact, obviously the interest of the church, in a temporal point of view, to preserve that superiority, which superior information and

* See N. & I. ch. III. No. 28.

learning gave her *. It is, undoubtedly, the praise of Christianity alone, that a few sparks of ancient learning were kept alive, in the wreck and ruin of the former state of things. In the significant language of a modern writer, ‘ Religion alone made a bridge, as it were, across the chaos, and has linked the two periods of ancient and modern civilization †.’

Some of those very corruptions of Christianity, which are loudly and justly complained of, served, for a time, the most important purposes. In consequence of the papal supremacy, a constant intercourse was kept up between the various nations of Europe; which tended, materially, to diffuse information, to break the gloom, and prepare the way for a better order of things ‡. By the establishment of the religious orders, the same end was promoted; and rich monastic establishments offered, in those days, the only shelter for the learned, and for learning itself §. The studies of the schoolmen, though we may be pleased, in our wisdom, to despise them, yet, unquestionably, sharpened and strengthened the mind; and from the Scriptures, and from the works of the earlier fathers, the solitary student acquired, in those establishments, what he could not have learned in the world, a knowledge

* See N. & I. ch. III. No. 29. † See N. & I. ch. III. No. 30.

‡ See N. & I. ch. III. No. 31. § See N. & I. ch. III. No. 32.

of the doctrines of genuine Christianity *. The gorgeous ceremonies, the power, and the splendour, of the church, gave it an influence over uncultivated minds, both of high and low degree, which, perhaps, over such minds, it could hardly, otherwise, have acquired. By all these things, the notion of the superiority, the certainty, and the truth of Christianity, lived, and grew up, and strengthened itself, during the dark ages, in the minds of men; and prepared them for clinging to it, with the fondest and most invincible affection, in the storm and tempest, which were to ensue in the days of purification.

For those days, a good and gracious Providence was making preparation. While the kings of the earth, the proud noble, and the humble peasant, were laying aside, by slow degrees, under the influence of Christianity, corrupted as she was, the violence and the ferocity of their ancestors, and opening their minds to more gentle influences,—while they were listening to the monkish chronicler, or the minstrel's lay,—the cell of the solitary monk beheld him, too, rising above the ignorance of his age and his profession. The learned leisure which he enjoyed, afforded him time for investigation; and, in better natures, devotional habits, and retirement from the busy scenes of life, taught the value of those sublime and holy truths, which that

* See N. & I. ch. III. No. 33.

investigation revealed *. As time went on, men were, more and more, roused to a sense of their real situation. Evils, which had remained unnoticed in days of darkness, became daily more perceptible; as the world emerged from gloom into light, under the gentle influence of that religion, which unfolded,—now the page immortalized by pagan genius, to refine and excite the intellect,—and now, the deathless record of sacred writ, to purify and elevate the heart. The true ministers of religion became, daily, more and more reluctant, to abet and aid the promulgation of falsehood, and to advance or sustain the monstrous domination of the Roman See, over the power of governments, and the consciences of individuals. Then came the dawning of a brighter day. The corruptions of Christianity, not useless as instruments, had done their work; and, when they were required no longer, they became purely mischievous and evil. Childish things were no longer fit for men; the lame, could throw aside their crutches; the blind man, had recovered his sight, and required no longer the hand to guide or support him.

We have now, in some degree, seen the work, which Christianity had to do in the middle ages: and, when we remember, that it was her task, to establish and strengthen her kingdom, in realms inhabited by

* See N. & I. No. 34.

barbarians, and over hearts sunk into sensuality and ignorance ; that it was her office, to soften ferocity, to repress passion, and gradually to pour in light, as the eye was able to bear it ; when we remember, that she was left alone to do the work, and that it *has* been done, fully and gloriously ; that Europe is now Christian, and, in a large part, Protestant also,—shall we still hear in silence, the reproach of having done so little, brought against her ? Shall we think, that the hand of God was not in this ? that the temporary oppression of the light,—the simultaneous pouring in of the many measures of meal, on the prepared leaven,—was not his work, who ever educes good from evil ? Shall we deny, that the mighty whole subsists ‘ with an ascent and progress in the main* ;’ an ascent and progress, indeed, disproportioned to the hopes of self-flattering minds, but ever and easily discernible ; that the cold pale dawn was advancing, gradually and steadily, to the full and perfect day ; and, that, though the holy and beautiful house, where the men of old time praised him, was burnt up with fire, and the pleasant things were laid waste †, yet he built up the old waste ; he raised up the former desolations ; he repaired the waste of many cities, the desolations of many generations ‡. Yea !

* Wordsworth’s Excursion.

† See Isa. lxiv. 11.

‡ See Isa. lxi. 4.

‘as the earth bringeth forth her bud; and, as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord God,’ by the same genial influence of sun and shower, of the early and the latter rain, was causing ‘righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations *.’

* Isa. lxi. 11.

CHAPTER IV.

Progress of Christianity in extent before the irruption of the Barbarians—Since that period—Its moral influence on private and public life—Its present prospects—Duty of all Christians to assist in propagating the Gospel.

THE last chapter was concluded by a rapid and hasty survey of the progress of Christianity, after the darkness, which had obscured religion and learning, for so long a period, had melted away. But we should do gross injustice to the argument, if we did not take, however briefly, a survey far more extensive both in time and space: and present a simple picture, of what our holy religion has effected, from its first entrance into the world; and of its future prospects, so far as they are connected with, and dependent on, its present state.

And what does that picture present to our contemplation? Assuredly, a system, not only not to be equalled, by the history of any other religion,—but one, to which, no other religion can offer the slightest resemblance. I will not, again, dwell on the apparently low origin of Christianity; nor on the contempt in which it was held, by a large portion of the nation where it arose; nor on the con-

tempt of the rest of the world, for that nation. I will not repeat the tale, of the persecutions, or the difficulties, with which the religion has had to struggle and contend. I will only say, that this religion, esteemed so low and mean; so despised, in a despised country; so beset with difficulties and persecution,—has triumphed over every obstacle, and is, at this very hour, the religion of the whole civilized world, and of well nigh a fourth part* of the human race: that, to the despised Galilean, who had not where to lay his head,—millions and millions of worshippers, on every returning Sabbath, send up the pious thought, the cry for pardon and for help, the earnest prayer, the heartfelt thanksgiving: that nations bend before his throne, and ‘kings bow down to it.’

But this consideration, however important, is not, I conceive, the most important part of the argument. The advocates of Christianity have too often been driven, by clamour, or by ridicule, from one of the strong holds of their cause; too easily induced, to acquiesce in a false statement, of the want of life and action in Christianity, since its first age,—and to mourn over its comparative slumber and inefficiency in these our days.

An inquiry, conducted on any candid principle, and with any just regard to the difficulties of the

* N. & I. ch. IV. No. 1.

case, would, I think, show, that, on the other hand, from the very first hour of the existence of Christianity, to the present, there has been, a progress ; sometimes indeed slow,—but still a constant progress, either in extent, or, what is of equal or greater importance, in moral influence. The stream has been sometimes stayed in its flow, by some tremendous barrier ; sometimes, broken by more petty obstacles ; but it has struggled over all, and holds its onward and irresistible course, to the ocean. The characters of this progress, during the first ages, as we have seen in the last chapter, were, indeed, written so strongly and clearly, that he who runs, may read ; and the very enemies of the cross, are compelled to own the undeniable truth. They endeavour, however, subsequently, to wrest the argument from our hands ; to use it, as a weapon against us ; and to infer positive failure, from the comparative slowness, with which the religion has advanced in later times.

But the progress of Christianity since its early ages, is, in fact, almost equally wonderful. We are apt, no doubt, to undervalue acquisitions already made, and to underrate difficulties actually surmounted ; to think nothing done, while any thing remains undone. But this, however valuable as a principle of future action, is no fit method of weighing past performances ; and, undoubtedly, no fit method, in this case, of considering the progress of Christianity. Let us look, for a

moment, to the period following that first age of rapid expansion ; and let us consider the work to be done.

Europe was barbarous, from the Rhine to Asia, from the Danube to the Pole. Let us examine the number of civilized kingdoms, which that wide realm embraces ; kingdoms, at the present day, widely influential on the happiness of mankind. It would be no mean list, which should enumerate Germany, Russia, and Britain, alone. But, to that list, we must add, in the remote North, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Iceland ; and more towards the centre, Hungary, Bohemia, and Poland, as well as the minor states of Moravia and Transylvania. In these kingdoms, it must be observed, that, not only single churches have been planted, so as to justify us, in saying, that the Gospel has been preached in these countries,—but Christianity has become the established religion of the whole population. Let us, then, consider all the difficulties of conversion ; the prejudices, which prevent its progress with an individual ; and the power, which opposes its introduction to a nation. Let us weigh with care, this long and remarkable catalogue : let us refer, especially, to the singular and curious history of the progress of Christianity in the east of Europe ; let us survey the difficulties which it there encountered ; and let us view the weak and erring instruments, by which

the purpose was generally achieved. When this survey has been taken, candour must compel the adversary to renounce the charge of want of success; and must induce him to confess, that the work to be effected, was a work of extraordinary difficulty and danger. It *was* effected, however, before the beginning of the fifteenth century; and Christendom was formed into a compact body, which, under God's blessing, seems able to defy the force of external enemies, and to supply ample and full means for Christianizing the world *.

And, since that period, are we to confine our view to Europe? Are we to take no note of a New World, which has sprung into view; to renounce the triumphs, which our cause can claim there; and to forget, or pass over, the progress which Christianity † has made, far and wide, over those vast realms?

Nay, are we to be confined, even within the pale of the Christian name? And is the religion of Christ Jesus, to be robbed of all praise, for the degree of truth, which it, and it alone, has infused into the religion of Mahomet; for the victory, which, by it, and by it alone, this impostor has gained, over the debasing idolatry of the olden times? Did Bel, indeed, bow down, and Nebo stoop, before the decep-

* See N. & I. ch. IV. No. 2.

† See N. & I. ch. IV. No. 3.

tions of the false prophet of Mecca, and not at the word of power, which the Koran learned from the Gospel * ?

But the adversary will bid the advocate of Christianity cease from his exultation; he will press upon him all the corruptions, which mark it, as a public establishment; and on these he will insist, as a proof of weakness or of failure. There is, indeed, enough to mourn for; enough to be done. In too many quarters of the Christian world, Christianity is still polluted: still degraded, by the profligacy and ignorance of multitudes of its teachers; still depressed, by the fatal consequences of impurity in doctrine and in worship. But it is vain to deny, that, in many points, the prospect is brightening. Let it be permitted to the Protestant,—not speaking unchristianly, not uncharitably, not harshly, of that ancient form, to which, he must be mindful, that, under God's blessing, he owes his own,—yet, let it be permitted to the Protestant, to remember and to rejoice, that the prospect is, in this respect, brightening; and that purer Christianity is tending to gain a wider sway †. Here, indeed, we seem, with our limited comprehensions, to trace and recognize the characters of the same scheme of love and goodness, which have marked the dealings of God with man, in all ages of revelation.

* See N. & I. ch. IV. No. 4.

† See N. & I. ch. IV. No. 5.

The Jew, coming forth from the carnal Egypt, was inclined to the grossest idolatry ; but yet, he was just so far raised and elevated in mind, by former traditions and revelations, as to be able to comprehend its evil and its danger ; to approve the better, even while he chose the worse : and, therefore, the better was bestowed upon him, by a gracious God. The leaven of truth was sent to work its way, and to extirpate the cureless evil of idolatry. The struggle was long, and arduous : the rebellions great, the punishments awful. But the work was done at last ; and idolatry was, finally, and for ever, expelled from the Hebrew commonwealth.

So it was, with the first introduction of Christianity, to the nations of the earth. Christianity, I mean, was introduced, long before it could (humanly speaking, and with reference to the state of public manners and opinions,) be fully accepted. The goodness of our Father and God sent it, so soon as it could effect any good ; so soon, as the spirit of the age could grapple with it at all *. Then, the imperishable leaven was left to struggle and work its way, and to leaven the nations as it might.

So it was, again, with the barbarous nations of Europe. Corrupted as Christianity was, when introduced to them, it was too pure, for their low

* See N. & I. ch. IV. No. 6.

nature fully to accept or understand. But still it was able to work on them, though imperfectly and slightly; to sow its seed in fear, and so prepare the way, for future generations to reap the fruit, in the gentle and sanctifying influence of love.

So is it, in these latter ages. From the days of Luther, to this hour, pure Christianity has been making progress. But we must remember, that, as the purity of the doctrine increases, the difficulty of its acceptance increases also: and that, therefore, in the very nature of things, this most important part of the great work of the regeneration and restoration of mankind, must be the most slowly performed; and more ages, perhaps, than the religion has yet seen, must be consecrated, to its gaining, not a wider territory, but, a firmer grasp, and stronger hold. In the better forms of Protestantism, we have the Christian doctrine in its greatest purity: purity, too great, to meet with full acceptance at present, but not too great, for the full apprehension of many; not too great, to shed infinite blessings now, and to produce effects inestimable hereafter. It is struggling with a world of evil; not *ready*, not *glad*, but still, often *able*, to accept it. And thus, in the Christian world, we have all the varieties of a system: in one quarter, the pure truth triumphs; in another, it is maintaining an arduous struggle; in a third, it is marred and mutilated, by a carnal and sensual

form. But, under all these modifications, the leaven is still working : Christianity is variously preached, the valleys are exalted, the hills are made low, and the way is preparing for that holier and better age of the Gospel dispensation, whose shoe-latchet the present race may be unworthy to loose. We can see, if we will but watch the signs of the times, that some of the regions which still suffer from an irrational form of worship, are opening their portals, for the reception of a purer system. The struggle will be often severe, before that purer system can gain a footing ; and long protracted, before it is established and triumphant. Nor must we shut our eyes to the sad warnings, given alike, by revelation, by reason, and by experience. That the love of many shall wax cold, that iniquity shall abound, even in the latter days, all Scripture teaches ; and the sealed book of prophecy, with mysterious voice, warns of apostasy and failure, even in the closing scenes of the Gospel. Reason, also, and experience tell us, that man, the agent of God, is still frail and peccable : that he will, sometimes, be deficient in zeal for the propagation of the Gospel, sometimes will sully its purity ; but that, in the end, failure, and mismanagement, will alike receive the chastisements of Him, who ruleth over all ; who impels the heavenly scheme ; and who forwards it to-day, by the powerful lessons which the grief and the woe of yesterday supply.

Such is the prospect, which a survey of the state of the Christian Church presents; and such reason for joy and thankfulness, does it give. Nor have we less reason to glow with exultation, when we look to the influence of Christianity in the moral world.

I speak not in forgetfulness of, nor without a deep and bitter mourning for, the yet wide reign, and wasting power, of indifference and sin. I know, and I lament, the snares of wealth, the enthrallments of luxury, the ravages of ambition. I behold, arrayed against us, all the fatal adversaries of our pure and holy religion.

Yet, over all these melancholy and mournful thoughts, there arises, in triumph, the remembrance of all that Christianity *has* done, and is *now doing*. Of its most difficult conquests, indeed, a large portion is overlooked by the human eye. While the evil done in its name, is seen by all, and dwelt upon in triumph by the adversary,—its pure and holy conquests are often effected in stillness and silence; in the abode of poverty, in the obscurity of humble and retired life. Who is there, that has seen a true Christian, in his life and his death? Who, that has seen the holy calm that sheds itself over that soul, where grace has triumphed over passion, where envy, and hatred, and pride, are sounds unknown? Who, that has seen the bright and holy glow of devotion diffused over the countenance? Who, that has heard the fervid

accents of a Christian prayer? Who, that knows the joy of a Christian's communion with his Maker, the devout aspirations of a soul which is the temple of the Holy Spirit, adorned and sanctified by his best and richest gifts and graces? Who, that has seen the Christian struggling with the storms of life,—though cast down, not destroyed; though perplexed, not in despair; submitting, with humbleresignation, to the correction of his heavenly Father; and gathering the peaceable fruits of righteousness, from the seed which was sown in tribulation and tears? And yet more, who, that hath seen that sight, on which angels look with joy; that hallowed bed, where a Christian renders up his soul, as to a faithful Creator; where, with no vain display, no idle rapture, the dying saint, knowing, of a truth, that he is faithful who promised, relies, in the last awful scenes of life, with humble confidence, on that hand, which has borne him up through all the storms and struggles of his earthly pilgrimage, and which will now cheer and comfort him, in his passage through the dark valley of the shadow of death? This is, not what Christianity *can* do, but what it *does*, day by day; not what it does, for the learned and enlightened Christian only, but what it does, to shed light and joy, over the humble abode of the lowly and ignorant. I appeal to the conscience of many a minister of

God's word, to bear me witness, how often he has stood beside the dying bed of feeble age, or of youth in all the withered blossom of its beauty ; stood, not to teach, but to learn ; not to offer comfort, or supply confidence,—but to gather strength, and hope, and courage, against his own hour of need, and his own great and awful change. This all, is the praise of the Gospel : this all, is the triumph, the glory, of the religion of Christ. Of the countless thousands, who have so lived and so died, what would have been the fate, in life and in death, had the Gospel never visited the world, had the Sun of righteousness never arisen, with healing on his wings ? What but this, at best,—that the Christian graces of humility, of meekness, of patience, should not have come to support, to purify, to elevate, and to bless them, in life,—and that in death, the unspeakable pang of parting here, should have been hushed by no hope of meeting hereafter ? that, even if, at that awful hour, no dismay of the Judge and the judgment, crushed the sinner's heart to the dust, yet, that, to the anxious question, the passionate longing, the restless search and aspiration, after some assurance of a future being, after a continuance or renovation of the feeble and expiring spark of life,—no voice should answer, and no hope should cheer ?

But I do not dwell, on the blessings of Christianity to individuals ; nor do I send the adversary to search

out his answer, in the shades of private life. I send him to society, and bid him find it there. I stop not to answer, truth disdains to answer, the wicked and contemptible sophistry, which charges the crimes of Christians, or of Christian ministers, on that religion, whose precepts they despise; and with whose holy name, they invest all the dictates of human passion, and worse than human wickedness. It were useless, indeed, to reason with minds, perverted enough to invent such arguments, or weak enough to be misled by them. I turn, in indignation, or rather in pity, from them, —to survey the genius of Christianity, shedding its holy influence over whole communities and nations.

Here, if I were debarred from any appeal to facts, I might still gain,—from all, who admit that any system of motives can work on the mind of man,—the free admission, that, Christianity, must of necessity, have the most powerful influence of all. For, whatsoever good it commands man to do, whatsoever evil it bids him avoid, the order and the prohibition come not from human thrones or powers: they are not the crippled and starveling fruits of a mean and debasing expediency; but they come, speaking, as never man spake, with the authority and majesty of power, from the throne of God, and from that will, which is essential holiness and goodness. The views and contemplations, again, in which the religion of Christ engages mankind, relate

to high, and noble, and heavenly objects ; and, with a voice, which, in the better moods of mind, man cannot disobey, call him off from lower occupations, as unworthy alike of his nature and his destiny ; and thus tend, beyond all question, to the elevation of every faculty, both of mind and heart. Nor does it seem possible to over-calculate the moral change, and the unspeakable advancement of mankind,—no longer taught to look up with veneration, to the wretched creatures of the heathen mythology ; no longer left to live, with nothing to love, and nothing to fear ; with nothing to hope, to lean on, to believe. Let us look to the lowliest village church in this happy land ; to the humblest pastor, and the simplest flock. Let us remember, as we see them pouring forth from its humble portal, what words have been on all lips, what thoughts in many hearts ; what thoughts of majesty and holiness, what love, what reliance, what confidence—and then, if we are not faithless to the dignity of that soul, which, though deteriorated, still retains the stamp of its Maker, let us believe, if we can, that no good has been effected, no passion softened and checked, no desire for the graces of a Christian temper implanted. Let this sight be compared, not with the population that collected, like our barbarous fore-fathers, or like the savages of modern days, to perform their bloody worship in the sight of the bright sun, or shining stars

of heaven ; but, with the population, which poured forth, from the lofty portals of some splendid temple of the polished Athens, to join in the iniquities of a Bacchanalian procession ; or with that, which, at this very time, assembles in the distant realms of Hindostan, sometimes, for deeds of cruelty and death, sometimes, for services so revolting, that the very Brahmin of better mind, hides his face for shame *, and sheds the burning tear of anguish, over the infamy of that religion, of which he is the minister ;—let but this comparison be simply made, and then let it be asked, what has Christianity done ?

Let us consider again,—and the consideration demands most earnest attention—what must be the necessary effect, of that conviction which Christianity impresses, that an account must hereafter be rendered, before One, who charges the very angels with folly, and in whose sight the heavens are themselves unclean ;—before One, whose piercing eye looks into the most secret chambers of the heart, and reads even the guilty thought, before it has strengthened into crime. Let us, again, look to the religions of ancient times, and consider, what crimes they tolerated, or, at least, marked by no proscription and no infamy, —and then, if we are not dead to all salutary conviction of the force of moral influence, let us estimate,

* See N. & I. ch. IV. No. 7.

what must be the efficacy of a religion, which, teaching us a strict observance of all the social relations of life, elevates the whole frame of morals; which teaches us, not to name the very name, of vices once openly practised, and generally tolerated; which forbids the heart to conceive, as well as the lip to utter, or the hand to execute, any evil purpose; which proscribes every guilty passion, and urges on, and cheers the human heart, to all that is lovely, and pure, and gentle, and peaceable, and of good report.

And if these things be so, it would be almost an insult, alike to Christianity and to man, to inquire into facts; to ask, if a religion, possessing such moral influence, and such powerful motives to forbid and to command,—has produced any effects. It would be to ask, whether man be susceptible of elevated thoughts, of cheering hopes, of ennobling joy, and of salutary fear. The prophet's vision, indeed, the fervid desires of the good man, and the sanguine anticipations of the imaginative one, may, doubtless, shadow forth a picture of beauty and of excellence, which cannot be realized in the Christian world. But can we live in it—with a knowledge, of what the boasted reason and strength of ancient wisdom and morals could effect*; of the recklessness of the holy claims of man on

* See N. & I. ch. IV. No. 8.

his brother man ; and of the awful pollution, pervading the whole tone of ancient society, and casting her accursed chains, even around the poet and the sage,—and then, can we look at the blessed effects of that systematic charity, which owes its existence to Christianity ; at the purity and sanctity of domestic enjoyments ; at the legible characters, in which, the sublime truths inculcated by the Gospel, are impressed on every institution of public life, and on the intercourse of man with man,—can we look at these things, and not blush to question, for a moment, the salutary and blessed operations of the Gospel * ? But I desist and forbear. It were vain to present a picture, to those, who cannot and will not regard it ; to those, who, in this country, and at this day, can require the office at our hands.

But if such be the present blessings which Christianity confers, what are its future prospects ? They would seem eminently calculated, to cheer the spirits, and strengthen the hopes and the confidence, of the believer. Let our thoughts transfer themselves, from the lowly Jesus walking by the lake of Galilee, with his few and simple followers, to the countless temples now reared to his honour ; and let us know, for our comfort, that, though there be worshippers with hearts as cold as the walls within which they sit,

* See N. & I. ch. IV. No. 9.

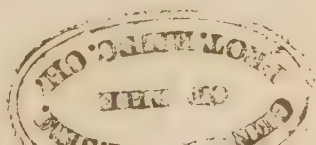
there are hearts, too, which rise in constant love to their Redeemer's throne, and glow with ardent zeal, for the dissemination of his name and his glory. They cannot, indeed, boast the miraculous works of the first apostles, to conquer and appal; but they have yet the means, by which God ordained, that, in the latter days, his holy work should be carried on. His protecting care is still over them; his Holy Spirit is still with them; and in the strength and confidence of that might, they will go forth to victory. Not only are the means and instruments in our hands; but the wide extent of Christianity, the power, the wealth, the influence, and the opportunities, of the nations which believe the Gospel, present a combination of unbounded expectation and promise.

On this mysterious subject, it would be as repugnant to the feelings of every considerate and Christian heart, as it would be inconsistent with that deep and soul-felt humility, with which alone it can become beings like us to survey the operations of the Deity—to speak or think—I say, not with confidence, but—with any thing approaching a feeling so irreverential; and to tread the holy ground, with our unhallowed feet.

When God shall finish his work, and command some future Isaiah to cry to his church, that her warfare is accomplished, who can foresee, in what manner he will be pleased to bring about his glorious

purposes ; what portion may be effected, by the conversion of existing races of barbarians, and what, by their gradual extinction and decay, before the ascending star of more favoured nations * ? Who may conjecture, what shall be the external form and fortune of the church of Christ ; whether, perhaps, cut off from all connexion with worldly pomp and power, it may win its way to the heart of man, by gentler and more holy influences, gathering strength from weakness, and snatching victory from defeat ; or whether the power of luxury, to degrade and corrupt mankind, shall, by long and cruel suffering, be broken down ; and so, at length, through evil, and struggle, and storm, the Gospel shall win its way to victory and peace ? Who, if we descend to particulars, can tell, whether any step towards the gradual conversion of Hindostan shall be made, by awakening in the many, and cherishing in the few, the cultivation of that almost forgotten philosophy, which still exists among them : whether, with God's blessing, it may pave the way, first, with the more enlightened, and then, through their influence, with the multitude, for the better and higher philosophy of the Gospel, and make men ready, for the reception of the pure light † ; or, whether, when friends, and kin-

* See N. & I. ch. IV. No. 10. † See N. & I. ch. IV. No. 11.



dred, and strangers, may have mingled their tears over the graves of yet another and another Middleton or Heber, that pure light shall win its way by its own resistless energy. Who can yet discern, all the importance of the part, which Mahometanism has sustained, in the schemes of Providence ; who foresee, how far more influential an office it may yet discharge, in the conversion of the world * ? But, yet, presumptuous and useless as must be all endeavours to penetrate into the purposes of God, we must remember, that, wheresoever he has committed a duty to our charge, it is for us, anxiously and constantly, to watch the favourable occasion ; and, at our peril, neither to neglect, nor overlook it. And when we contemplate the signs of the times, with the anxious, but humble, eye of inquiry, there are, beyond all question, things which press and weigh upon us ; voices, which compel attention, and will not be gainsayed ; sights, which force themselves on the vision of the most reluctant eye.

Is it not the simple fact, that, if we look to this country alone, there is neither tongue nor nation, with which we have not an easy and ready intercourse ? Is it not true, that this distant and petty island, the offspring, as it were, of yesterday, the

* See N. & I. ch. IV. No. 12.

child of barbarian and ignorant forefathers,—is now the mistress of well-nigh an hundred millions of men, in the farthest East, where the sun of civilization had arisen, centuries before our name was written in the catalogue of nations; but where its beams have not yet dispelled the thick darkness of idolatry, nor chased into everlasting night, the foul orgies of a false and debasing superstition? Is it not the fact, that the very establishment of British dominion in India, has removed that influence, which alone preserved the purity of caste, by the severities which it practised on its violation; and has, thus, prepared the way, for the gradual downfall of the greatest bar and hindrance to the entrance of the Gospel?

In one word, for time would fail us, if we attempted to descend to particulars, are there not, on every side, marks to be discerned, which cannot be mistaken, that Europe is daily stamping her character deeper on the East; and that the East is daily yielding herself, more and more willingly, to the salutary impression? Is it not undeniable, that a few years of honest assertion of the truth, of apostolical zeal, and of Christian love, have, in the subjugation of hostile feelings, worked the most salutary effects; effects, for which, even the lives of those saintly men, who were called to their reward, far away from all the endearing ties of kindred and country, and whose

bones rest on the distant shores of Hindostan, is not an offering too costly, a sacrifice too precious * ?

But look in a different, but assuredly not less important sphere ; look at the signal, the marvellous, increase of facilities of communication, with almost every tribe which can utter an intelligible sound, by the extraordinary attention and diligence, which the busy mind of man has directed, of latter years, to the study of languages ; and mark the astonishing success, with which that diligence has been rewarded : so that, to almost every nation, a preacher might be sent, who could speak, in its own tongue, the wonderful works of God. And are all these indications nothing ? Are they all, things of course ? Or are they, merely, some of the wild efforts of the resistless activity of man, aimless and purposeless, or, at best, seeking, by disproportioned means, some evil or worthless end ; now, hoping to rive the mighty oak, with an arm sinewless as an infant's ; and now, collecting a giant's strength, to crush an insect into dust † ? What, though deep be thus calling to deep, and the face of the universe already swell like the ocean, with the first breath of the coming tempest, can our dull ear hear no loftier voice among them, and discern no omnipotent hand, compelling and controlling the storm ?

But what will Christian duty say to us, in this

* See N. & I. ch. IV. No. 13. † See N. & I. ch. IV. No. 14.

matter? Will she not demand of us, why we turn away, as though they were nothing to us, from visions, splendid as those, which, in past ages, charmed the eye of prophecy; why we heedlessly pass by, nor deign to look on them, even with the regard which we commonly bestow on an unsubstantial pageant? Shall we be deaf, too, on the one side, to the voice of humanity, still groaning under the lash of superstition and idolatry; on the other, to the voice of God, urging us to relieve or to cheer her? Shall all the concentrated energies, of the most masterly minds, be devoted to the littleness of commerce and of finance, and not kindle into extasy, at partaking, and promoting, more lofty, and ennobling, and sanctifying designs? The call of duty is surely clear; the instruments are put into our hands; the conjuncture is favourable; and shall we be wanting, as a nation, and as individuals? Shall the day never come, when governments and nations will feel their highest interest, will confess their highest duty; and hasten to give, at least, the weight of their influence, and the impulse of their resources, to the cause of God and man? Shall England be content, if her name be ever blotted out, and her glory extinguished, to have no trophies in the East, but the trophies of avarice, and of power; no record, but that 'wild and dream-like tale of blood and guile,' which is written in the page, that com-

memorates her connexion with Hindostan ? Shall the nation, which possesses a Church so pure and apostolical, be content, for the sake of a little earthly treasure, to leave it, helpless as it now is ; —to struggle on, to send martyr after martyr, willing and happy, indeed, to die for their Master, but unequal to a work, confessedly too great for the single strength of any human being ? But the faults and the neglect of nations and of governments, will form no excuse, for the faults and the neglect of individuals. We should all feel, whether as members, or as ministers, of Christ's Holy Church, that, whatsoever our hand findeth to do, towards prospering our Master's work, *that* we are bound to do ; bound, by every motive, which the love of God, the love of our fellows, and the fear of future judgment, can inspire.

Most of all, would I call on the young, to remember this great duty ; on those, who are just entering into life, rich in hopes, in strength, in talent, in station, in influence ; and, as yet, for their happiness, not swathed nor wrapped in the intricate movements of society ; not yet delivered up, bound and helpless, to the prosecution of some scheme of worldly interest or advantage ! Yet even of them, it may be, many are going into life, only with the indefinite hope, of advancing themselves, their families, and their country ; a career, which they may render high and honourable, by consecrating a due

portion of their thoughts, and hopes, and desires, to yet higher and more lofty purposes; or which they may make base and selfish, by confining it to the present state of things alone, and by pursuing a course, merely of worldly honour and of worldly glory. Let them remember, that they are soon to sleep in the dust; the name of their families, perhaps, to perish and be forgotten; and the splendour and power of their country, it may be, to fade away. And can they believe, that all their high endowments, their rich gifts and graces of intellect, were given them, only to build up for themselves, and for men and things which may perish with them, a glory and a power, as passing and as ephemeral as themselves? Do they not feel within, the working of an immortal spirit, the spirit of an immortal essence; and, in that germ of immortality, do they not read their own dedication to immortal ends? Can God have given it, and not intend it to be used, in the promotion of plans and purposes, which, when the world itself is crumbled into dust, shall live, and grow, and be as immortal as himself? Let them not defeat the gracious purpose; or, rather, I would say, let them not deprive themselves of the honour, which awaits all faithful instruments of its execution. Let them be true to Him, and to themselves: to themselves, I say; for what is it, that generates so much misery, what is it, that makes life sordid and mean, and

robs it of all the joys, which a gracious Creator has bestowed liberally—what, but the want of some sanctifying object, which shall divest, of all power to debase and degrade, the daily duties of daily life ; and even bestow on them an elevated, holy character ? What is it, that makes the daily commerce of man with man, a dreary intercourse, and robs life of its joys, but this—that there is in the world, a great and beneficial plan, pervading the whole, and that we shut ourselves out from participation in it ; that, in our littleness, we will, for ever, be pursuing our own individual schemes and objects, and thus put ourselves out of harmony, with the universal spirit of good and joy ?

To the young then, I would say, be not you so deceived, so robbed of your happiness, so misled to your ruin. Remember, I would fain beseech you, that your heavenly Father, in calling you to promote his works, calls on you to promote your own happiness, earthly and heavenly. Give yourselves, then, to this great object, each of you in his measure and degree. I speak not to those, who are about to bind themselves by a vow, to serve at the altar of God ; and to give thoughts, hope, heart, yea, even life itself, to his service. But I call on all, as Christians, to join in the work ; to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, by that most efficacious of all preaching, a Christian life, and conversation ; and to answer, too,

with solicitous and ready zeal, to every call which the Church of Christ shall make on them, for counsel and for succour. I will promise to those who do so, all the happiness in return, which can arise from a conscience satisfied, and God obeyed.

Would that I could set before you, also, the full lustre and splendour of that plan, whose consummation you will hasten. But shall the feeble tongue of feeble man essay to recount, or his mind to comprehend, the glorious fulness of that plan, on which the angels of God look with wonder and awe; which subsisted in the eternal Mind, before the foundations of the world were laid; and which shall be accomplished, only when they are crumbled in the dust; that plan, by which He designs to elevate a ruined race, to more than their original glory; and to consummate all the joy and peace of that scheme, which, in the beginning, his wisdom devised, to bless and exalt an universe? Shall we endeavour, with the weakness of mortal sight, to meet the full splendour of the beatific vision; and not, with the lawgiver, hide ourselves in the cleft of the rock, to see the skirts of the divine glory? Rather, let us, in solitude and prayer, lift up our eyes to behold, our hearts to adore, our hands to supplicate. Yet even here, be the earnest prayer of the full heart uttered. Hasten thy coming, Lord; bring on the years, accomplish the warfare; that we, with all the vast assemblage of departed saints, and

with all the countless multitudes, who shall, hereafter, be sanctified by thy Gospel, and shall depart in the faith and fear of thy holy name, may have our perfect consummation and bliss, in thy eternal and everlasting kingdom ; and may there form one fold, under one Shepherd ; there meet, and bow before thy throne !

NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

TO

CHAPTER I.

Note 1. Page 6. line 1. ‘ *Their private lives.*’

*Infidel Objections on the ground of want of Universality,
&c. enumerated.*

THE objections made on these grounds are, I believe, as fully stated by Mr. Tindal, as by any other of the Infidel writers of the last century.

I. The first, is summed up in a single sentence. ‘ If the necessities of mankind have always been as great, and the goodness of God always the same, would not these oblige him to have prescribed an immediate remedy for the disease, and not deferred it for 4000 years together *?’ The same argument is alleged by Lord Herbert, Lord Bolingbroke †, and others.

The answers to this first objection are, pretty generally, as follow :

1. We cannot be expected to assign, or even to know, the reasons for God’s proceedings. Do we pretend, for example, to know, why he created the world no sooner ?

* Christianity as Old as the Creation. P. 401. (Ed. 1700.)

† Works, vol. V. p. 295.

But, in the present case, we *can* see some reasons. For

2. If our Lord had come earlier, then it would have been alleged, that he appeared in a barbarous and ignorant age; and his history would have been treated as fabulous.

3. If our Lord had come sooner, the sinfulness and insufficiency of man by himself, and his need of Divine assistance, would not have been so clearly perceived. As it is, we know what human learning and wisdom can do by themselves, and how utterly insufficient they are.

4. If our Lord had come sooner, we should not have had the strong evidence, nor the admirable preparation for his coming, arising from a succession of prophets; who, in different ages, conspired, with a wonderful harmony, in their predictions concerning the Messiah to come.

5. If our Lord had come sooner, by so much as one, two, or three thousand years, yet, would not the objection be as strong as it is now? And might not it be asked, with the same justice, why the remedy was not applied, when the wound was received? why the coming of the Saviour did not immediately follow the Fall? The spirit of this objection would tend to show, that we ought never to have been created, or redeemed at all.

6. In what sense, is the word *late* used in this objection? Suppose the world to endure for thirty or forty thousand years, for example, could it be alleged by a candid inquirer, that the remedy for sin was introduced at a late period of the world's existence *?

* 'The few years of our infancy might be thought a very considerable time, were the ordinary term of human life much shorter; whereas, in the present state of things, it appears otherwise. Let the season of the promulgation of the Gospel be considered, as the infancy of the Christian state. In that view, no sufficient objections can be raised, on supposition that it shall flourish for millions

The chief part of these replies will be found in Dr. Leland's Answer, to a book entitled, 'Christianity as Old,' &c. *; in the same author's 'View of the Deistical Writers †;' in the late Dean Hall's Bampton Lectures; in Dr. Parr's Spital Sermon; and in Bp. Coneybeare's Defence of Revealed Religion ‡.

But there are yet other answers, of no small weight, to be given to this objection. The candid antagonist of Christianity, (if such there be) will allow, that, when evil has made wide ravages, the application of a remedy requires, in order to be successful, a happy choice of circumstances, and a long course of preparation. That the circumstances of the world were more favourable, though many difficulties still existed, at the time of our Lord's appearance, than they had ever previously been; and that it required a long time, and a superintending Providence, to effect that favourable conjuncture, is shewn in a subsequent note. And the proof of these points is, clearly, an additional answer to the objection now before us.

II. The next of these objections is, that Christianity is not discovered to all. This is stated by Mr. Tindal, in the following words:

'What human legislator, if he found a defect in his laws, and thought it for the good of his subjects to add new laws, would not promulgate them to all his people? Or what parent would act in so partial a manner as the Doctor (Clarke), in a self-confounding scheme, supposes the common Parent of mankind has done, and not let all his chil-

of ages, in full maturity; none, but what may equally be urged against the state of infancy, in the consideration of human life.' *Coneybeare's Defence*, p. 417.

* Vol. II. p. 453—455.

† Vol. I. p. 20; Vol. II. p. 210. ed. 1807.

‡ P. 416, and foll.

dren know, as soon as possible, what was for their common good * ?'

The answers usually offered to this objection are,

1. A reference to the analogy of nature ; where, we find that God ' hath made whole classes of beings vastly superior to others, in valuable gifts and endowments, and capacities for happiness ;' and that, ' in his dealings with the human race, we may observe a very remarkable variety. Some are, from the beginning, endued with much greater natural abilities, and more excellent dispositions ; and are placed in more favourable situations, and happier circumstances. Some whole nations, are eminently distinguished from others, not only, with respect to many other advantages of human life, but, with respect to the means of moral improvement ; and are furnished with more excellent helps, for making a progress in wisdom and virtue, and consequently in true happiness.'

Even supposing that we had a right to inquire, why God has done so, can we allege any injustice in his proceedings ? Is there any thing contrary to the strictest notions, which we can form, of a just Creator, in the supposition, that he will create beings endowed with various powers and qualifications for enjoyment ? Is there any thing, which, even in *our* apprehension, is unjust, in his not creating all beings exactly alike, and all of the highest degree of excellence ? Is it unjust, that he should have made some animals without reason, *because* he has created some with reason ? If not, is there any thing, in the possession of reason, which entitles all its

* Christianity as Old, &c. p. 399, 400. The same line is taken, by Lord Bolingbroke, *Works*, vol. V. p. 295 ; by the author of ' Deism fairly Stated.' (See Leland, I. p. 283.) Mr. Chubb, it seems, did not think this argument good for much. *Posthumous Works*, vol. I. p. 213—219.

possessors, to an equal share of intellectual powers? Is there any thing, in the possession of moral capacities, which entitles all, to *equal* opportunities of cultivation, and those opportunities the highest? Is it unjust to have created man such, that, for many years of his life, he has not the full use of his powers?

2. But, secondly, it is always to be remembered, that mankind will, at the last, be equitably dealt with, by their common Father; that the Saviour of the world, though he may not be revealed to all, *died* for all; that, through him, all in whom God sees a fit mind, will receive everlasting salvation; and that, finally, in judging of that fitness, respect will be had to means and opportunities. It is a mere calumny on the part of the infidels, to say, that, according to the Gospel, all who do not believe in Christ will be damned, whether they ever heard of him or not: damned, as Lord Bolingbroke * expresses it, ‘for involuntary ignorance.’ ‘The declarations,’ as Dr. Leland rightly observes †, ‘made in the Gospel, of the necessity of believing in Christ, and the punishment of those who do not believe, plainly relate to those, who have an opportunity of being acquainted with the Christian Revelation ‡.’

The sole difficulty in this case, is, undoubtedly, the difficulty of supposing, that God will not give equal means of improving moral capacities, to all those, to whom he has given those capacities. But there are facts lying before us, which we cannot get rid of. Whether we like it or not, the truth is, that many and great nations are lying in barbarism and savage ignorance; and that, among civilized nations, different

* Works, vol. V. p. 295.

† View, vol. II. p. 219.

‡ See Hall’s Bampton Lectures, p. 23, 24.

individuals have different means of improvement. This does not make us disbelieve that there is a great moral Governor of all; and, consequently, if we reason consistently, the want of universality in a Revelation ought not to make us doubt, that it comes from him*.

III. The third of these objections is built on the general corruption of the Christian world. ‘What impartial man,’ says Mr. Tindal, ‘who hath compared the former and present condition of mankind, can think the world much mended since the times of Tiberius; or, though ever so well versed in church history, can, from the conduct of Christians, find that they are arrived to any higher state of perfection, than the rest of mankind, who are supposed to continue in their degeneracy and corruption †?’ And again, ‘What, in most places, passes for the Christian religion, if not the chiefest part of it, has transformed this social and benignant creature, into one fierce and cruel ‡,’ &c. &c. P. 406.

The arguments § usually alleged in reply, are as follow:

(1) It is replied, that the allegation is absurd in theory.

* See Leland’s View, vol. I. p. 20; vol. II. p. 210; Leland’s Answer to ‘Christianity as Old,’ &c. vol. II. p. 461, et seq.; Hall’s Bampton’s Lectures, 1—28; Hartley ‘Of the Truth of the Christian Religion,’ (in Watson’s Theological Tracts, vol. VI. p. 69); Coneybeare’s Defence, pp. 394, et seq.

Bishop Coneybeare shows, clearly, that, if this infidel objection is held valid, we may derive these four consequences from it:

(1) God ought to bestow on every man, all the happiness, of every kind, of which his nature is capable.

(2) God ought to have bestowed on man, as high capacities for happiness, as he has bestowed on any being.

(3) God ought to have made no distinction, of any kind, between his several creatures.

(4) God ought to have produced all his creatures, from all eternity; or, if this were impossible, he ought not to have produced them at all.

† Christianity as Old,’ &c. p. 404. ed. 1730.

‡ So Lord Bolingbroke, *Works*, vol. V. p. 111, and p. 258.

§ It may be right to notice the species of arguments, alleged by Mr. Tindal, in

For, as Christianity does not impair men's reason, and as, according to the objector's own statement, it confirms whatever reason points out in morals, it can therefore do no harm. But it lays down yet clearer and stricter rules of morals, and gives stronger motives to virtue : it must, therefore, so far as it is accepted, do good, while man is a fit subject for a moral dispensation at all ; and this, not even the infidel himself has presumed to deny.

(2) It is replied, that the allegation is unfounded in fact. For, though Christianity has not done all which it might, or hereafter may do, it still has done much. If we look to individuals, we are to look to *real*, not *nominal* Christians ; and no man of candour will deny, that, *cæteris paribus*, a good Christian is better than a good heathen. If we look to bodies of men, it is clear, as well from the testimony of enemies, as from that of friends, that Christianity produced extraordinary effects on the morals of its first followers : and that, even now, much is effected ; for, though some real Christians may have unhappily lapsed into sin, they are, yet, in a much better moral state, than they would have been, without that restraint on their evil natures, which

support of his reasoning. They consist, principally, of very strong and vehement reprobation of the vices of Christians, by Christian writers ; as, for instance, the following from Bishop Kidder : ' Were a wise man to choose his religion, by the lives of those who profess it, perhaps Christianity would be the last religion he would choose.' It is, precisely, in a kindred spirit, that Roman Catholics, in order to show that the Reformation did no good, regularly introduce from early Protestant writers, strong declarations respecting the vices of Protestants. In each case, much is, of course, to be allowed for declamation ; and much is to be taken, as indignant remonstrance against those who are disgracing a good cause, by their misconduct. It is to these writers, that Coneybearc (p. 422,) alludes, when he says, that ' Several worthy persons have, in a heat of zeal, and to press Christians to a greater circumspection, sometimes expressed themselves incautiously.'

Christianity affords*. Nor can it be doubted, that, both indirectly and directly, Christianity has been productive of very great advantages to society. See, on this subject, chap. IV. note 9.

3. All, therefore, which, in fact, can be meant by the argument, is, that Christianity aims at the complete correction and amendment of all, but that it does not in all attain its object. And when this argument is resolved into its component parts, one would suppose, that the infidel ought to be ashamed of it. What, in the first place, would he think of a Divine Revelation, which did not forbid all vice, and exhort to all virtue; but which was contented to leave men in a low condition of morality? What would he say, next, of man as a moral agent, if compelled, by miraculous interposition, to avoid vice, and practise virtue? And, finally, by what other, than a miraculous interposition, does he believe, that vice can at once be banished from the world, while human beings are liable to their present frailty and corruption?

There are some very valuable remarks in Dr. Macknight, *'On the Truth of the Gospel,'* on this subject. After pointing out the public benefits done to the world by Christianity †, and observing, that much of the efficacy of Christianity is to be sought for in private life, he asserts, and shows, that the Christian is, in fact, better than the heathen world, although, according to the natural progress of things, fresh temptations to vice are perpetually recurring, and the old ones still remain, so that the task of religion becomes perpetually harder. He adds, that any revelation from God,

* See Bishop Gibson's *Second Pastoral Letter*. *Reclination Theol.* II. p. 192.

† See chap. IV. note 9.

implies the exercise of free will by man ; i. e. implies ‘ the possibility, of its being perverted and resisted. Hence, the desired effects will not always follow ; at least in such a degree, as we may imagine proper.’ (p. 52.) This resistance, was foreseen and foretold by our Lord ; and is, therefore, a proof of the truth of Christianity. In conclusion, he says, that they who will not look at the *tendencies* of God’s dispensations, but will consider their effects, must, if they are consistent, end in Atheism. At least, when they see how the law of nature, manifested by reason, is perverted and abused, they cannot or ought not to allow, that it can come from God *. (p. 54.)

Note 2. P. 12. line 14. ‘ *Ought to be great and rapid.*’

On the gradual Operations of Providence.

THE following observations deserve notice ; and more will be found, to the same purpose, in subsequent notes.

‘ These questions imply an expectation, that, while human works admit of preparation, the works of God will, in every case, be done instantly. But it is manifest, that this expectation is contradicted by the whole course of nature. For, although God may, by a word of his mouth, do all his pleasure, yet he generally chooses, for wise reasons, some of which we are often able to trace, to employ means ; and, to allow such a gradual operation of those means, as admits of a progress, in which one thing paves the way for another, and gives notice of its approach. In all that process, by which food for man and beast is brought out of the ground ;

* For these arguments see Leland’s View, II. p. 207 ; Answer to Christianity as such, &c. &c. II. p. 474 ; Coneybeare’s Defence, p. 420 ; Hill’s Lectures, vol. I. p. 333.

in the opening of the human mind, from infancy to manhood ; and in those natural changes, which affect the bowels or the surface of the earth,—we profit very much, by marking the slow advances of nature to its end ; and, therefore, we need not be surprised, to find the steps of Divine Providence, in the publication of the Gospel, very different from the haste, which, in our imagination, appears desirable *.’

‘ The circumstances of the world are such, that it is impossible to promulgate this religion universally, but by length of time, and by slow degrees. The intercourse we have with many heathen people, is small ; their languages to us unknown, and perhaps so barren, many of them, as to want improvement, for the conveyance of religious notions. As the ignorance of the Heathen is great, so their prejudices are great likewise ; and, as they are utterly unacquainted with the credit of those histories on which the evidence of the Christian faith is built, so, it cannot be an easy matter to make a progress in this affair. The conversion of Heathens, therefore, must be the work of time. A more free intercourse with them must be opened ; arts and sciences cultivated ; their languages known and improved †.’

‘ Throughout the whole order of creation, and the whole scheme of Providence, we observe marks of a progressive advancement, and a gradual discovery of truth. In all the operations of the human mind ; in the important discoveries of art ; and in the improvements of law and government,—we go on step by step, as leisure and opportunities offer, or as new wants are created, until, at last, we have completely filled up the first rude outline, which necessity suggested. A similar progress is to be observed, in the higher and more

* Hill's Lectures, vol. I. p. 324.

† Coneybeare's Defence, p. 418.

valuable truths of religion ; and God, in mercy and love to his creatures, seems, always, to have proportioned his discoveries, not only to the actual wants of mankind, but to their capacity of receiving truth themselves, and their means of communicating it to others *.'

Note 3. P. 14. line 13. '*Justified in requiring it.*'

THAT Christianity could not have been propagated so well by miraculous means, will be allowed by every one who considers, that a constant miracle and an overruling controul ' would have superseded the use of human reason ; would have destroyed the free agency, and, consequently, the responsibility, of man ; and would have taken away all the merit of a rational faith, a faith founded on conviction †.' I need hardly refer the reader to Bishop Butler's invaluable observations, on the moral advantages, which may be derived, from our not possessing such full evidence of the truth of religion, as we have, in many cases, in scientific researches ‡. It is to be especially remembered, that, as he has remarked, the very nature of religion shows, that God does not look so much to external events, or to the fact, of things being done, as to the *motives* on which they *are* done. We may well believe, that God does not desire to make men religious, *in spite* of themselves : and yet, this would be the case, if a miraculous interposition (and such alone could effect the

* Hall's Bampton Lectures, p. 17. The last topic is treated at full length in Bishop Law's Theory of Religion ; in Coneybeare's Defence, p. 411 et seq. ; Jeffery's Sermons (Complete Collection, vol. II. p. 195) called ' The Important Differences,' &c, are worth attention ; and also Lord Barrington's Essay on the Dispensations of God, in his Misc. Sacra, Vol. III. p. 1—123. ed. 1770.

† Hall's Bampton Lectures, I. p. 21.

‡ See Analogy, Part II. chap. VI.

object) were to bring the evidences of religion *irresistibly* home to our minds. ‘Some consequences,’ says Dr. Paley, ‘would, it is probable, attend this economy, which do not seem to befit a revelation that proceeded from God; one is, that irresistible proof would restrain the voluntary powers too much; would not answer the purpose of trial and probation; would call for no exercise of candour, seriousness, humility, and inquiry; no submission of passions, interests, and prejudices, to moral evidence and to probable truth; no habits of reflection; none of that previous desire to learn and to obey the will of God, which forms, perhaps, the test of the virtuous principle, and which induces men to attend, with care and reverence, to every credible intimation of that will, and to resign present advantages and present pleasures, to every reasonable expectation of propitiating his favour. Men’s moral probation may be, whether they will take due care to inform themselves by impartial consideration? and, afterwards, whether they will act as the case requires, upon the evidence which they have? and this, we find by experience, is often our probation in our temporal capacity *.’

Bishop Law has shown very well, that a revelation must be communicated, either, (1) as ours is, through the means of human instruments; or, (2) by immediate inspiration to individuals; or, (3) by a constant series of miracles.

In the second method, if the influence were not irresistible, (i. e. so strong as to take away all freedom of thinking and acting, and, consequently, to destroy whatever is valuable in religion,) it would be insufficient. It must, as an *illumination*, either be distinguishable from the present effects of reason, and from the ordinary operation of the Holy Ghost,

* Evidences, Part III. chap. VI.

or not. If the former, it must be, by working more infallible conviction in our minds; and precisely as much as it does, so much is taken from the present choice and merit of believing: superseding all action and inquiry of our own, and producing *infallible* conviction, it would be inconsistent with the exercise of our best faculties. But if it was *not* distinguishable from the present use of our faculties, of what advantage could it be? Much the same observation will apply, if we consider it as an *impulse*, exciting the mind always to follow the determination of the judgment. Besides which, since in either case, all must be transacted within a man's own breast, if he retain *any liberty* at all, why might he not stifle it, as he does the other good thoughts suggested to his conscience, and *accepted* by it, as certainly true? Why might it not, on the other hand, be perverted, to serve the purpose of enthusiasm and imposture?

As to the third method, the continual exhibition of miracles, would, in all probability, be as little regarded, as the preaching of religion is now; and in that case, constant miracles would, in time, be no miracles at all*.

Note 4. P. 15. last line but one, '*of the human intellect.*'

'THE consequence of a Divine illumination is, that the whole doctrine must have been, not, indeed, obvious to the human understanding, not within the reach of its unassisted power to discover, but consonant to the highest reason, nor

* See Bp. Law's Theory, p. 16—28. (ed. 1820.); Bishop Blackall's Works, II. p. 1038; Macknight (On the Truth of the Gospel, p. 52,) observes, that 'if a scheme for the reformation of the world is really carried on by God, it must leave the human mind in some degree free; otherwise, it will destroy moral agency, and, consequently, defeat its own end.' So Bishop Fowler, Lect. III. chap. XVI.

too difficult, when propounded, for the human apprehension*.'

Note 5. P. 18. last line, '*almost imperceptible*.'

THE reader will find, in the early † part of the fourth section of Mr. Erskine's work on the Evidences, some very valuable remarks, on the internal obstacles which the Gospel finds; the principal of which is, that a true belief in its doctrines, implies a change of heart and life, and involves the most serious moral obligations.

Dr. Jortin has given, very fairly, some of the great obstacles to Christianity. He observes, that the prejudices of education, and stubbornness of superstition, make a change of religion very difficult: that the worldly policy of rulers is against it: that, in the case of Christianity, the mean circumstances of the first apostles; the slanders circulated against them; the changes which Christianity required, from indulgence to abstinence, from sin to righteousness; and the prospect of suffering for their new profession,—were all most serious obstacles. It needs hardly be added, that these obstacles, are so many arguments for the truth of that religion, which has surmounted them ‡.

President Edwards suggests, on the other hand, some interesting reasons, which may have induced Providence to make the steps, for setting up Christ's kingdom, so long in accomplishing; especially, that, in this way, God's wisdom is made more visible to his creatures. 'If it had been done at once, in an instant, or a very short time, there

* Bp. Horsley's Charge, p. 74.

† I say the *early* part; for, with much, in the latter part of that section, which is valuable, there is very much, to which I cannot at all assent.

‡ See Jortin's Discourses, ch. II.

would not have been such opportunities, for creatures, to perceive, and observe, the particular steps of Divine wisdom, as when the work is gradually accomplished, and one effect of his wisdom is held forth for observation after another *.'

Note 6. P. 20. line 13. '*The slow progress of truth.*'

'MANKIND are not, nor have been, capable of entering into the depths of knowledge all at once; of receiving a whole system of natural or moral truths together: but must be let into them by degrees; and have them communicated by little and little, as they are able to receive and relish the communication. In this manner, does every art and science make its way into the world. And, though, now and then, an extraordinary genius may arise, and reach, as it were, some ages beyond that in which he lives, yet, how very few of his contemporaries are able to follow him, or comprehend the import of what he delivers? The generality still go step by step, in gathering up, and digesting, some small portion of that stock of knowledge, which he poured out at once; and are, for a long time, in respect to him, but mere children †.'

P. Malebranche, in his '*Search after Truth*,' has enumerated, with great diligence, all the obstacles which present themselves to the progress of truth; and has shown how the senses, the imagination, the pure intellect, and the inclinations and passions of men, lead them away from the truth. This, too, is the case of those who are *searching after* truth. But we must remember, that a large portion

* History of the Work of Redemption, p. 264. (fourth edition.)

† Bp. Law's Theory, p. 50.

of mankind is not able, a large portion not inclined, to enter on that search; and a large portion, from their defects of circumstance, opposed to it.

Note 7. P. 23. line 18. ‘ *They have practised.*’

It cannot be otherwise expected, than that human nature, in its endeavours to recover from its fall, should meet with frequent relapses; which may be attended with this good effect, to put them upon exerting themselves with greater vigour, to maintain their ground better, for the future. The way to perfection, is steep and arduous; and man ascends it with difficulty: when he has advanced a little way, he makes a false step, and is borne down again; and it costs him much pains and labour, to regain the ground he had lost. We are, as yet, advanced but a little way up the hill; we have had many hindrances, and many more we must expect to meet with, before we gain the summit of it. Moreover, as God’s *judgments are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out*, we are very incompetent judges, what dispositions of things, in all circumstances, are best, for bringing nature to perfection. As nothing happens in the world, but by his appointment or permission, and as he has wise ends and purposes to serve, by every thing that doth happen, so, we may assuredly conclude, he had in this, however inexplicable it may appear to us. Human nature, it should seem, required such a discipline; and true religion was reduced to this low and distressed condition, that it might rise out of it, more glorious and flourishing. It was put into this furnace, to be refined and purified; and, having purged itself of its corruptions, it will better guard against them, and preserve itself the freer from them, for

the future. For, the Popish tyranny, on the one hand, and the Turks and Saracens, on the other, were the scourges of Christendom, and continue too much so still; wherewith, God was pleased to chastise it, for its sins: who, in this, as well as in other respects, makes use of the ministry of wicked men and devils, in the government of his church*.

Note 8. P. 24. line 21. ‘*Most adverse.*’

‘IN this, we may see one difference between the methods, of human wisdom, and of divine wisdom. Human wisdom spares no pains and industry, in seeking out, and applying, helps and instruments proper, in the ordinary course of things, to bring about its designs. But divine wisdom often chooses means, in all appearance unsuitable, and yet, in reality, the most effectual; which conduct of Providence, St. Paul thus describes: ‘God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the things that are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen: yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought, things that are; that no flesh should glory in his presence†.’

Mr. Keble has touched this subject, with his usual delicacy and beauty:

He only knows, for He can read
The mystery of the wicked heart,
Why vainly oft our arrows speed,
When aim’d with most unerring art;
While, from some rude and powerless arm,
A random shaft, in season sent,
Shall light upon some lurking harm,
And work some wonder, little meant ‡.

* Worthington’s Essay on the Scheme and Conduct, &c. of Man’s Redemption, p. 146.

† Jortin on the Christian Religion, p. 105.

‡ Christian Year, p. 324.

CHAPTER II.

Note 1. P. 30. line 1.

MANY writers have shown, that the time chosen for our Lord's coming was peculiarly favourable, for the introduction of a new religion; and have shown, likewise, how the delay was productive of great advantage, in the way of evidence.

1. The long series of prophecies, which had foretold our Lord's coming, tended much to prepare his way; and that invaluable evidence would have been lost, or lessened, had he come sooner.

2. These prophecies had excited a general expectation of Messiah's coming; insomuch, that impostors frequently arose, pretending that they were the Messiah.

3. The general dispersion of the Jews, and the translation of the Scriptures into Greek, had made the Gentiles widely acquainted with the Scriptures; and thus, led them to a knowledge of the true God, and an expectation of the Messiah, and of a more perfect dispensation*.

4. The age in which Christ was born, was a learned age. It cannot be said, that the people of his time were so savage, or so ignorant, that they would have been easily imposed on; nor, that the early reception of the Gospel is to be imputed to credulity.

* Law's Theory, p. 115.

5. The period at which our Lord came, was so late, as to have afforded full time, for human reason and human philosophy, to try their strength in guiding mankind; and to shew their insufficiency*.

6. The moral state of the world, both Jewish and Gentile, at our Lord's coming, was such, as, eminently, to require a great moral teacher.

7. The religious state of the world required it also; the Jews had corrupted a good religion, and dreadful superstition prevailed among the Heathens. Some parts of that religion, debased the people; the best parts, had a very feeble sway. Some philosophers laughed at all religion; and the best, were in uncertainty.

8. The nations of the world being united in one monarchy, when Christ came, and when the apostles went forth to preach, did greatly prepare the way, for the spreading of the Gospel. For, the world being thus subject to one government, a ready communication was opened, from nation to nation†.

The conquests of Rome, by causing this easy communi-

* God was pleased, says Pres. Edwards, to suffer human learning to come to such a height, before he sent the Gospel into the world, that the world might see the insufficiency of all their own wisdom, for obtaining the knowledge of God, without the Gospel of Christ, and the teachings of the Spirit. *History of the Work of Redemption*, p. 346. 4th edit.

“An appeal,” says Miller, “directed wholly to the better part of the spirit of man, to motives, and hopes, and faculties, of a character altogether spiritual, refined, and unseen, appears to have been reserved, until the ministration of death and condemnation, put to proof and found wanting, might itself stand forth, in its wreck and insufficiency, an additional and convincing argument, that, to live by sight, is not the way to conquer the perverse will, nor to bring the heart of man into that extent of obedience and of purity, of which, even in the present life, God is pleased to make it capable.” *Bampton Lectures*, p. 41.

† Edward's *History of the Work of Redemption*, p. 177. 4th edit.

cation, and by tending to the introduction of a common language, were surely an instrument in God's hands *.

9. Among the Jews, the opinions imbibed in the captivity, as to a future state, and the gradual decay of the Mosaic system, were favourable.

Bishop Law puts the matter in the following light ; that the period in which our Saviour came, was the fittest, first, as that age appeared to want it most, both, in regard to morals, and religion : secondly, as that age was the most able to receive and propagate Christianity, both among Jews and Gentiles, by successive series of instructions ; being better qualified, than before, to value and comprehend a purer system of religion and morals ; and the state of the empire giving great facilities, for propagating a new opinion : and, thirdly, as that age was the best qualified, to examine its evidence, confirm its truth, and convey it down to future ages ; the knowledge, abilities, learning, &c. &c. of that day, enabling and inclining the men who lived in it, to detect error and embrace truth. They had learned to despise all the pretended sources of communication with the Deity, by oracles and divination ; and thence, to suspect all pretensions to such communication. The number of writers, and anxious inquirers, as to every object of curiosity, made it certain, also, that every great event would be much discussed. The Bishop adds, that all these circumstances tend to fix the time of our Lord's coming, as especially adapted for it : and that there is yet one more, which does so in a still greater degree, viz. that the Jews had then lost

* This preparation for the Gospel is noticed by Prudentius, in a passage worthy of the reader's attention. See Prud. c. Symm. II. 577—627.

the power of life and death ; and that, if our Lord had come while they retained it, they would have destroyed him, as soon as they found that he was not such a Messiah as they expected*.

The late Dean Hall has shown, in his eighth Bampton Lecture, that these reasons divide themselves into two classes. The one, showing why God would not send his Son *earlier* : and these are the proofs, that, the time when our Lord came, was that fixed on by the Holy Spirit beforehand : the time when he was universally expected ; and when the circumstances were favourable for him. The second class of reasons, shows, why his coming was not deferred *longer* ; and consists of proofs, that the moral and religious state of mankind was such, as to require a better dispensation.

The reader may observe, that the extreme and general corruption of *morals*, at the time of our Lord's coming, is pleaded as a reason, why that time was a fit one ; while, on the other hand, the improved state of opinion among the Jews, and the many fruitless researches of the learned Gentiles, indicating the insufficiency of human reason,—are also alleged as reasons, why the time was favourable. I do not know, that there is even an apparent inconsistency between these two statements, in this, their true form. Nor would there be any such inconsistency, even if the second statement were made stronger ; and if a very considerable improvement were allowed to have taken place, both in Jewish and Gentile opinion. For opinion and practice, even under a better system, do not go hand in hand, as they

* Law's Theory, p. 131—163. These arguments will be found in Coneybeare's Defence, p. 407 and following. Robertson's Sermon, in the Scotch Preacher, vol. i. p. 73—108. Dr. Parr's Sermon, on this point. Jortin on the Christian Religion, p. 158—176. Leland's Advantages, &c. vol. i. p. 488.

should. And, in the case before us, the opinions would have been entirely speculative ; and not influential on the practice. Had the Jew laid aside the rigorous observation of the Mosaic law, and had the Gentile renounced his hopes of improvement from philosophy, their morals would not, therefore, have been ameliorated. I have, however, seen statements, on this matter, occasionally carried too far, or not properly guarded, in Christian writers. Thus, Mr. West says, that ‘ every thing which most strongly influences and tyrannizes over the mind of man, religion, custom, law, policy, pride, interest, vice, and even philosophy, were united against the Gospel.’ Now, that very many of the philosophers were violent against the Gospel, is well known ; but, it is equally true, that from its own insufficiency, having been seen by many, and even felt by many, the state of philosophy was, on the whole, favourable to the reception of Christianity*.

I shall conclude the present note, with this observation ; that the circumstances already recited, form, after all, only as it were, the external part of the case. Providence, we see, was disposing events and empires, so as to favour the introduction of Christianity. And, if we will trace the moral history of mankind in Scripture, we shall observe, in correspondence with this, that there has been a gradual progress of light bestowed by God on man, from the early revelations to the patriarchs, to the last revelation by Jesus Christ. Thus, the two parts of the plan coincide: the de-

* I am inclined to believe, that error in reasoning, in these cases, is often produced by a lax use of words. To say, that a conjuncture is *favourable* for a particular purpose, may, perhaps, lead persons astray, and induce them to think that there is *nothing* in it *unfavourable* : whereas, it is sufficient for our argument, if we show, that the *most* favourable time has been chosen.

termination, I mean, to give more light to mankind, as they could bear it; and the disposition of events, to effect the purpose. We have an opportunity of comparing two of the dispensations fully; I mean the Mosaic and the Christian. And, assuming, as we must assume, the purposes of God, towards man, to be ever the same, we see a striking difference in the character of the two dispensations. The *natural* is first in order; and served as our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ: and then followed the second, and *spiritual* dispensation. We do not, therefore, from finding that great preparatives existed, for a new dispensation, argue that its importance must be adequate to such preparatives, and its superiority over former dispensations, manifest and paramount; but, we establish that fact, from a comparison of the contents of the two dispensations themselves. Mr. Miller has traced this part of the subject, in the most admirable manner, in the second of his invaluable Bampton Lectures.

Note 2. P. 31. line 11.

‘IT is to be observed, that these early persecutions were not altogether the result of state policy, directed against the growth of a political evil. Had it been so, the Roman power was competent, without the intervention of some signal miracle, to have, certainly, crushed the new sect*.’

I would beg, also, to refer to a remarkable passage, in Jortin’s Discourse on the Truth of the Christian Religion †.

* Hinds on the Rise and Progress, &c. vol. II. p. 269.

† Discourse II. § 8.

Note 3. P. 32. line 3. '*Forests of Calabria.*'

For some most interesting details, as to the cruelties exercised on the Protestants, at Venice and in Calabria, see Dr. M'Crie's *History of the Reformation in Italy*, p. 231—237, and p. 257—268.

Note 4. P. 32. line 20. '*Quick succession.*'

'It may be said that all these ten persecutions will not prove, that Christians were all along in a state of persecution, till the conversion of Constantine: for, the lives of some of these persecutors were short; and when they were dead, their edicts were little regarded, and then peace might be restored to the churches *.' The dates of the reigns are as follows :—

	A.D.
Claudius	41
Nero	54
Galba	68
Otho	69
Vitellius	69
Vespasian	69
Titus	80
Domitian	81
Nerva	96
Trajan	98

Note 5. P. 33. line 4. '*as well as of martyrs.*'

THESE exaggerations are found, especially, in the Mar-

* Lardner, vol. VIII. p. 338. 8vo. ed. 1788; or vol. III. p. 340. first 4to. ed. And so Jortin, *Remarks*, vol. III. p. 302. first edition.

tyrologies; but they have, no doubt, occasionally been repeated by modern writers. For example, Godeau states, that, in the tenth persecution, 17,000 were killed, in one month, in Egypt; that 144,000 died there by violence, in the persecution; and 700,000 of banishment or ill usage*.

It may be well, just to present a short view, of the persecutions of Christianity.

The reader is, doubtless, aware, that ecclesiastical writers have commonly enumerated ten persecutions, viz.—

	A.D.	
1. Under Nero	65.....	{ Tac. Ann. XV. 44. Sueton. Nero. c. 16.
2. Under Domitian	90.....	{ Dion. Cass. LXVII. p. 766. al. p. 1112.
3. Under Trajan	100.....	{ Plin. Epist. X. 97. Euseb. H. E. III. 33.
4. Under Adrian & Antoninus Pius	126—140.	Euseb. H. E. IV. 8, 9, 13. 26.
5. Under M. Aurelius Antoninus	168.....	Euseb. H. E. IV. 15. V. 1.
6. Under Severus	203.....	{ Sulp. Sever. II. 32. Euseb. H. E. VI. I. Spartian Se- ver. 1617.
7. Under Maximin	236.....	{ Sulp. Sev. II. 32. Euseb. H. E. VI. 28.
8. Under Decius	249.....	{ Euseb. H. E. VI. 39. S. Sever. II. 32.
9. Under Valerian	257.....	{ Dionys. apud. Euseb. H. E. VII. 11.
10. Under Dioclesian.....	303 †	{ Sulp. Sev. II. 47. Theodo- ret. H. E. VIII. 39.

Mosheim says, that there were not so many as ten general persecutions, through the extent of the Roman empire; but that there were far more minor and provincial ones. The number *ten* was, in his judgment, fixed on, about the fifth

* See Millar, on the Propagation of the Gospel, I. p. 373. Mr. Gibbon's 74th note on his sixteenth chapter, mentions a tale of 10,000 Christian soldiers crucified in one day on Mount Ararat, and refers to Tillemont Mem. Eccl. vol. II. pt. ii. p. 438. and to Geddes's Miscellanies, vol. II. p. 203.

† St. Augustin omits Adrian's (the fifth); and inserts a persecution by Aurelian, between the ninth and tenth. De civ. Dei. xviii. 52. So, St. Jerome. See Lardner, Testimonies, chap. XLI. vol. VIII. p. 337. 2d ed.; vol. III. p. 337, 4th edition.

century; from an idea, then entertained by the Christians, that the Scriptures foretold ten persecutions, to the church of Christ *. They conceived the ten plagues of Egypt † to prefigure these persecutions; and they referred to Rev. xvii. 14., for a yet more distinct anticipation of them ‡. Although there is, doubtless, truth in this statement, it is equally true, on the other hand, that some of these persecutions were most severe; and that, even when no general persecutions were raging, individuals were constantly exposed to sufferings for their Christian profession. Lardner says, that Christianity was, all along, in a state of persecution, till the time of Constantine §: and although persecution was, as Dr. Hey observes, often suspended ||, Christians were always liable to it. Thus, for example, Nerva's short reign was, no doubt, favourable to the Christian cause; as that emperor forbade the accusations of slaves, to be received against their masters: still, as Neander observes **, Christianity was still not a *religio licita*; and the rage, which had been suppressed in Nerva's short reign, would, probably, burst forth, with greater violence, after his death. But it may be well to look, for a moment, at the evidence which history offers, with respect to the persecutions above enumerated, in order that their effects may be estimated.

1. The first is that of Nero; and of its severity and cruelty at Rome, there is, I believe, no question. Even Dodwell ††,

* It would seem, that they did not quite agree, whether the final persecution by Antichrist, in the end of the world, was to be the tenth or the eleventh.

† See Oros. VII. 37.

‡ Mosheim de Rebus Christianorum, ante Constantinum, p. 97—101.

§ Testimonies, Vol. IX. p. 334.

|| Lectures, Book I. chap. XVIII. § 13.

** Allg. G. I. 1. 139.

†† De Pauc. Mart. § 13.

is compelled to allow it fully. The difficulty is, to decide whether it extended to the provinces. It must be allowed that there is no *direct* evidence on the subject, except the celebrated Lusitanian inscription *, (the authority of which has been doubted by Scaliger and others †,) and the statement of Orosius ‡, that the persecution went through the provinces. Mosheim seems to think, that there is some weight to be attributed to the expression of Tertullian §; in which, he speaks of the decrees of Nero and Domitian against the Christians, as importing a *general* attack on them; and he adds, that his opinion, on the whole, is, that the persecution was general. For, though the pretence on which the persecution was grounded, was, not the religion of the Christians, but their having fired Rome, yet, for consistency's sake, Nero could hardly have allowed the companions and relatives of those, whom he had accused of such a crime, and persecuted for it with such cruelty, in the city, to live unmolested in the provinces. The fear of similar conspiracies in

* Gruter. I. p. 238. No. 9.

† This was given by Gruter, 'Ex Schotti et Metelli Schedis,' but it could not be found in Spain or Portugal. The phrase 'nova superstitio,' is certainly suspicious; but yet it is difficult to see, for what end it could be forged. It never appears, I believe, nor was heard of, before Gruter; and his work was not written, with any views of supporting Christianity. Mr. Gibbon (Note 43, on chap. XV.) says, that the inscription is a manifest and acknowledged forgery, contrived by that noted impostor, Cyriacus of Ancona, to flatter the pride and prejudices of the Spaniards. See Ferrera's *Histoire d'Espagne*, T. I. p. 192. On looking to the Spanish, Ferrera Vol. II. p. 97, I certainly find, that he says, that the inscription was published, first, by Cyriacus of Ancona; but I confess that I doubt it. Gruter gives it, as I have mentioned above. Besides which, I doubt whether Cyriacus was ever in Spain. And as to the hard names which Mr. Gibbon bestows on him, he is far from deserving them; as has been amply shewn by Tiraboschi, *Storia*, &c. vol. VI. p. 199. I am aware, that Cyriacus was occasionally deceived; but, in all my examinations of his fragments, I had never any reason to believe, that he was a deceiver.

the provinces, would seem to justify, and call for, severe edicts against men capable of such a crime *. This is, surely, at least, of equal weight with Dodwell's flippant remark †, that the people in the provinces could not be accused of setting fire to Rome. Mr. Hinds ‡ agrees to this; and adds, that this persecution was 'long currently believed to be general.' Neander § says, that it must have been prejudicial to the situation of the Christians, in the provinces. It has always been understood, that it lasted for four years; when it was terminated, by the death of Nero. Neander (*ubi supra*) observes, that the belief among the Christians, that Nero was not dead, but gone beyond the Euphrates, to return as Antichrist, shows the character of his persecution, and the effect it had produced on the Christians.

2. Of the persecution under Domitian, little is known. Hegesippus || says, that Domitian issued orders for the destruction of the whole race of David; and that the relations of our Lord, were, in consequence, submitted to examination. The story is not improbable: for, as Mosheim justly remarks, some enemy of the Jews and Christians might easily suggest the probability of a disturbance, on the true ground, of the expectations of the Jews respecting a future king; and on a misrepresentation of the notions of the Christians, as to their King **. This persecution was, however, short; nor is there any proof of its extent. Dodwell says it lasted hardly a year; which he seems to think nothing ††.

* Mosheim, p. 109.

† Vol. I. p. 382.

|| Apud. Euseb. iii. 19.

†† De Pauc. Mart. 16.

† De Pauc. Mart. § 13.

§ Allg. Gesch. I. 1. p. 137.

** See Justin M. Apol. ii. 58.

3. Little needs be said, on the persecution in Trajan's time; as it has been so often and so fully discussed. Suffice it to say, that, although it is evident, that the emperor did not *thirst* for the blood of the Christians; yet, even he, gave directions, that they were to be punished, if *accused*; an event, as Neander observes *, which, in the then temper of the popular mind would frequently happen †. And the evidence we have, as to *Bithynia*, is sufficient ground, for supposing the persecution to have been general. Dodwell admits a persecution at Antioch; in which, there is a record that Ignatius, Zosimus, and Rufus were slaughtered; that in Bithynia; one in Syria; one in the proconsular Asia ‡. He argues, as usual, that there were very few martyrs, because we have not their names. Yet he cites a passage from Polycarp, §, in which that author distinctly notices *others, besides those named*.

4. It appears, I think, pretty clearly, that, in the time of Hadrian, the priests induced the people to act as accusers of the Christians; in which case, the magistrates would feel themselves compelled, to act on Trajan's law. That this was the case, in the provinces, and to a considerable extent, appears from the fact, that a letter was addressed by Serenus Granianus, the Proconsul of Asia, pointing out to the Emperor the iniquity of these proceedings. Such tumultuary measures as popular accusations, can never, as Neander ob-

* Allg. Gesch. vol. I. 1. p. 146.

† This, in fact, is Eusebius's account exactly; for he says, as Mosheim observes, (De Reb. p. 231.) 'Sub Trajano, per singulas urbes, *populari motu*, passim persecutio in Christianos excitabatur,' (H. E. III. 32. p. 103.) The Senate, according to Mosheim, had abrogated Nero's laws, and Nerva those of Domitian (see Lact. de Mort. Pers. c. 8.); which caused Pliny's difficulty, how to act.

‡ De Pauc. Mart. § 18—27.

§ Ad Phil. p. 21. ed. Ush.

serves *, be acceptable to right-minded governors ; and, in consequence, Hadrian addressed a rescript to the successor of Granianus, Minutius Fundanus, directing, that only such Christians as were *legitimately* accused, and convicted, of some crime, should be punished. Mosheim † conceives that this law of Hadrian, did not differ much from that of Trajan ; which, certainly, made perseverance, in adhering to Christianity, after being brought before a magistrate, and required to renounce it, *a crime* punishable with death ‡. At all events the law of Trajan was not abrogated, and great latitude was given to governors §. We may, I think, allow, that this rescript of Hadrian was so far favourable to the Christians ||, that it repressed tumultuary accusations ; and allowed a magistrate *well inclined* towards them, to protect them, to a certain degree ; as Neander ¶ shows, from Tertullian **, was occasionally the case. We may add, that it appears from Melito ††, that this rescript was addressed to the other governors of provinces in Greece, as well as to the governors of Asia ; that is to say, that there were persecutions against the Christians, in other provinces, as well as

* Allg. G. vol. i. l. p. 147.

† De Reb. p. 237.

‡ I say *death* ; for Mr. Gibbon seems to think death, the only severity worth notice. When extolling the tender mercies of the heathens, he says (chap. xvi. p. 111.), that they ‘contented themselves for the most part with the *milder* chastisements, of imprisonment, exile, or slavery in the mines.’ It seems curious, that Tertullian is his authority ; who complains, very naturally, of this extraordinary gentleness. Mr. Gibbon has been careful to omit the complaints, immediately preceding these, and in the same chapter ; viz. that the Christians were burnt, crucified, and thrown to wild-beasts, &c. &c. Apol. xii.

§ Some of the words are ‘ Si quis ergo accuset et ostendat quidpiam contra leges ab iis factum, tu pro gravitate delicti statue.’

|| Dodwell argues, that there were no martyrs, because we have not their names. Suppose that Pliny had put any to death, who was to record their names ? Does any early writer affect, to give the names of the two Deaconesses, whom he tortured ?

¶ Vol. i. p. 149.

** Ad. Scap c. iv.

†† Apud Euseb. H. E. iv. 26.

Asia. Soon after the death of Hadrian, many calamities befell the empire ; and the popular fury, no longer repressed by his law, burst forth with redoubled fury under his successor. We know, that that remarkable person did much to repress it ; although there seems reason for doubting the genuineness of the rescript, (πρὸς τὸ κοινὸν τῆς Ἀσίας) commonly ascribed to him*.

Justin Martyr's first apology, addressed to Pius Antoninus, M. Antoninus, Lucius Verus, and the senate and people of Rome, shows sufficiently, the state of persecution, under which the Christians then laboured † ; and it does not appear necessary, to produce any farther argument. Men do not address to governments, petitions and remonstrances, against evils which do not exist.

5. Under M. Antoninus, the Christians suffered more, than under his predecessor. Even Dodwell ventures only to say, that there were not so *many* martyrs, as is commonly supposed ‡. It appears, from Melito §, that there were many edicts unfavourable to the Christians ; and from Athenagoras, that accusations were easily admitted. Then we have the striking and affecting history of the Churches of Vienne and Lyons ; which, in itself, is enough to show the state of the case. Be it observed, that, in this case, the emperor himself directed, that '*they who confessed they were Christians, were to be killed.*' Dodwell allows ||, that there

* See Neander's Allg. Gesch. I. i. p. 152. Dodwell allows, that the various rescripts of A. Pius, to various towns in Greece, show that popular tumults were excited there ; but he *thinks*, there were not *many* martyrs made ; the Emperor's rescripts came in time, as he says, to stop mischief.

† There is some doubt, whether the second Apology is addressed to Antoninus Pius, or Marcus Antoninus. See the Bishop of Lincoln's Work on Justin Martyr, p. 15.

‡ Sect. 35.

§ Apud. Euseb. H. E. iv. 26.

|| Sect. 38.

is no reason to doubt, that, as soon as the news of this conviction, by means of slaves, was known, ‘the clamour of the people, the zeal of the fanatics, and the avarice of the factions, would burst forth, as far as *law* would allow.’ But he *thinks*, that, *probably*, the prefects of provinces would not have persecuted; and that the persecutors would have been obliged to resort to a class of magistrates, who had not the power of life and death. However, some sort of a persecution, though a very poor one, (the phrases *ἐλαύνεσθαι καὶ διώκεσθαι*, which he cites, *not meaning much*) he allows, both in Greece and Asia Minor, as well as Gaul. It was during this reign, that Polycarp was put to death at Smyrna.

6. The persecution in the time of Severus, was of a still more formidable nature: if we may trust the evidence of those, who endured it. In fact, shortly after the death of Commodus, we find from Clemens Alexandrinus, that ‘he saw, every day, martyrs *burnt, crucified, or beheaded.*’ Severus himself, was not, at first, ill disposed towards the Christians; but, from circumstances, he was induced to issue an edict, in A.D. 202, making any conversion to Christianity punishable. This gave rise to popular commotions against the Christians: and, though not general, the persecutions in some places, were most dreadful; in Egypt, and the Proconsular Africa, especially. The history of the martyrdom of Speratus and his friends, and that of the females Perpetua and Felicitas, with three men, are full of interest; and very strongly show the spirit always felt, in some quarter or other, against Christianity.

7. In the persecution under Maximin, his orders, Dodwell thinks, extended only to the *regiones suburbicaneæ*, and to Bishops. The other persecutions in his time, arose

from popular feeling; and the Christians were allowed to fly*.

8. It would seem, I think, that, from the death of Severus in A.D. 211, with the short exception of Maximin's reign, the Christians enjoyed tolerable peace and safety, till the time of Decius, in A.D. 249. It is well known, that Christianity had spread, and that, as a warm friend of the old religion, Decius was the more anxious to suppress it. His edicts were of the severest nature; and he called on all prefects and magistrates, on pain of being severely punished themselves, not to spare the Christians.

The evidence of Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, is sufficient to show what the state of things was. In addressing a heathen magistrate, he not only states, that the Christians were subjected to death and torments; but he says, that *short* torments were not reckoned enough: 'Admoves laniandis corporibus longa tormenta; multiplicas lacerandis visceribus numerosa supplicia; nec feritas atque immanitas tua usitatis potest contenta esse tormentis; excogitat novas pœnas ingeniosa crudelitas †.' I do not see, that we need make any allowances for strong expressions here. What sense would there be, in addressing a complaint to a magistrate, against misconduct, of which he had not been guilty? But, again, we find ‡, that the weak Christians came in such crowds, to renounce Christianity, that 'a magistratibus, vespere urgente, dilati sunt.' Does this look as if they had nothing to fear, unless they had done so?

In the letters of S. Cyprian §, we find, not only general

* Dodwell, §. 51. Neander, Allg. Gesch. vol. i. li p. 191.

† Cyprian ad Demetrian. p. 190. Ed. Fell.

‡ De Lapsis, p. 125.

§ See Letters 10, 20, 22, 39.

assertions, of torment and death being used, but records of several, who underwent them. In letter twenty-two (Lucian), it appears, that fourteen were starved to death in prison. I do not know how many deaths Mr. Dodwell and Mr. Gibbon would require, to make a decent persecution. It is easy, to sneer at the idle stories, of *thousands* dying together. But, for a moderate demand, fourteen deaths, by one method, in one city, and at one time, would seem to be no inadequate supply. The plain fact, at which we want to arrive, is, what effect would such a persecution have, on the progress of Christianity? Did Dodwell and Gibbon really think, that there was not sufficient ill-usage of the Christians, to produce a most unfavourable result to the progress of the religion, for the time?

9. The persecution under Valerian, does not seem to have reached to such an extent, as the last. S. Cyprian, however, was put to death; and the edict of A.D. 258, directed bishops, priests, and deacons to be killed; senators and knights, to lose their estates; and, if they persevere, to suffer death, &c. &c.

10. I am content, to refer the reader to Mr. Gibbon, for the persecution under Diocletian. For, with all his desire to mitigate the worst features, it will present sufficient proofs, even in his representation, of what the Christians had to undergo. I would only add, so fatal were the effects of this persecution, that the Heathens thought they had extirpated Christianity.

Note 6. P. 33. line 8. ‘*Calculated to make.*’

THERE can be no doubt whatever, in the minds of those who have examined the records of history with candour,

that they present full, and sufficient evidence, that the number of Christians who suffered for their religion, is very great; as also, that their sufferings were most dreadful; although indiscreet zeal may have exaggerated both numbers and sufferings. Tacitus, himself, bears witness to the *vast multitude*, who were seized in Nero's time; as well as, to the horrid cruelties exercised on them. See the last note.

On this subject, the recent historian, M. Matter, who is far from disposed to give any undue preference to the Christian party, makes a sharp and just remark: 'On a dit quelquefois, que les Chrétiens avoient exagéré le nombre de leurs martyrs; et cela ne doit pas se nier, d'une manière absolue: cependant, les traités sur le *petit nombre des anciens Martyrs*, rappellent involontairement, ceux qui, dans les tems modernes, ont qualifié la S. Barthelemy d'échauffourée.' He adds, 'L'histoire ne doit jamais excuser ceux qui versent le sang de l'innocence; et la preuve que la persécution de Néron fut terrible, se trouve dans la tradition Chrétienne, qui, après sa mort, voulait qu'il fut retiré en orient pour en revenir un jour, en qualité d'Antichrist *.'

Note 7. P. 33. line 22.

A sufficient number of examples of these complaints, will be found collected, in the later part of Cave's Primitive Christianity, Part II. Chapter 7. See especially S. Cyprian. de Lapsis, p. 122. 124. De bono pat. p. 219. Letters X. XX. XXIV. ed. Fell.

* M. Matter, Histoire Univ. de l'Egl. Chrétienne, vol. i. p. 35.

Note 8. P. 34. line 1. '*multitudes.*'

ON the persecutions of Christians by mobs, Mr. Hinds has observed, with great justice, that much ill feeling would be stirred up against the Christians, by those whose interests they injured; as 'the silversmith, the sculptor, the seller of victims, or the expounder of oracles': and that these persons would, of course, affect to be influenced by a sense of religion; and would impute Atheism, and all sorts of crimes, to the Christians, in order to furnish motives with which men could sympathise. M. Matter has with great acuteness summed up the reasons, which the people would make, or find, for hating the Christians. They who did not become Christians, he tells us, 'ne virent en eux, que des hommes qui divisaient les familles; qui méprisaient les Dieux, les lois, et les usages du pays; qui ne se rendaient pas aux mêmes autels, aux mêmes fêtes, aux mêmes spectacles; qui refusaient de porter les armes, de partager les charges communes; et qui ne rendaient compte à personne, si ce n'est à Dieu, des motifs qu'ils avaient pour exclure de leur association, la majorité de leurs concitoyens. Certes, il y avait là beaucoup plus qu'il n'en fallait, pour exciter la haine, et alimenter la calomnie dans la populace. Bientôt dans son sein, circulèrent, sur les réunions secrètes des Chrétiens, les bruits les plus absurdes. On les accusait, de célébrer des banquets d'Atride, et de se livrer à d'effroyables égaremens. Mais ce qui désarme toutes les accusations du Paganisme, c'est que la désignation des vices, qu'il reproche à ses adversaires, est empruntée à sa propre histoire *.'

* M. Matter, Histoire Universelle de l'Eglise Chrétienne, vol. I. p. 90.

I translate a passage from Neander, which is excellent :
' All the persecutions, however, did not proceed from governments. The Christians were often the victims of popular fury. The people saw in the Christians, the enemies of the gods ; and that was the same thing, as men without any religion. ' The Atheists,' was the common name of the Christians, in the mouth of the people ; and the most horrible and incredible allegations against such men, easily found credence. We find the same reports, about the Christians, spread among the people, as have been spread, at various times, about such religious sects, as became an object of hatred and disgust, to popular fanaticism ; viz. that they gave themselves up to unnatural lusts in their meetings ; killed and eat children, &c. &c. The reports of ill disposed slaves, or of those, from whom exactly such explanations as were wished for, were extorted by tortures, were used as grounds, for absurd accusations, and for palliations of the popular rage. If, in hot countries, a long delay of rain caused a drought, it was, according to S. Augustin, in northern Africa, already become a proverb, *Non pluit Deus, duc ad Christianos*. If, in Egypt, the Nile did not fertilize the fields ; if the Tiber overflowed, at Rome ; if an infectious sickness raged ; on every earthquake, every famine, or any other public calamity, the popular fury was easily roused against the Christians. ' This,' it was said, ' must be ascribed to the anger of the gods, against the growth of Christianity.' And how can we wonder at the *people* judging in this way, when Porphyry, a man who pretended to philosophy, alleged as the cause why a contagious disease would not cease, that Esculapius would no longer exert himself on earth. There were not wanting persons, who

sought to excite the popular feeling against the Christians ; priests, artificers, and others, who got gain from the service of the gods, like Demetrius in the Acts ; magicians, who saw their tricks exposed ; and hypocritical cynics, who saw their hypocrisy unveiled by the Christians *.

‘ In a large and tumultuous assembly, the restraints of fear and shame, so forcible on the minds of individuals, are deprived of the greatest part of their influence. The pious Christian, as he was desirous to detain, or to escape the glory of martyrdom, expected, either with impatience or with terror, the stated returns of the public games or festivals. On those occasions, the inhabitants of the great cities of the empire were collected in the circus of the theatre ; where every circumstance of the place, as well as of the ceremony, contributed to kindle their devotion, and to extinguish their humanity. Whilst the numerous spectators, crowned with garlands, perfumed with incense, purified with the blood of victims, and surrounded with the altars and statues of their tutelar deities, resigned themselves to the enjoyment of pleasures, which they considered as an essential part of their religious worship ; they recollected that the Christians alone abhorred the gods of mankind, and by their absence and melancholy on these solemn festivals, seemed to insult or to lament the public felicity. If the empire had been afflicted by any recent calamity, by a plague, a famine, or an unsuccessful war ; if the Tyber had, or if the Nile had not, risen beyond its banks ; if the earth had shaken, or if the temperate order of the seasons had been interrupted, the superstitious pagans were convinced,

* Neander, *Allg. Gesch* I. Part I. p. 132, 133.

that the crimes and the impiety of the Christians, who were spared by the excessive lenity of the government, had at length provoked the Divine justice. It was not among a licentious and exasperated populace, that the forms of legal proceedings could be preserved: it was not in an amphitheatre, stained with the blood of wild beasts and gladiators, that the voice of compassion would be heard. The impatient clamours of the multitude denounced the Christians, as the enemies of gods and men, doomed them to the severest tortures, and, venturing to accuse by name some of the most distinguished of the new sectaries, required, with irresistible vehemence, that they should be instantly apprehended and sent to the lions. The provincial governors and magistrates, who presided in the public spectacles, were usually inclined to gratify the inclinations, and to appease the rage, of the people, by the sacrifice of a few obnoxious victims. But the wisdom of the emperors protected the church from the dangers of these tumultuous clamours and irregular accusations, which they justly censured as repugnant both to the firmness and the equity of their administration. The edicts of Adrian and of Antoninus Pius expressly declared, that the voice of the multitude should never be admitted, as legal evidence, to convict or to punish those unfortunate persons, who had embraced the enthusiasm of the Christians*.

This last observation merits attention; because Mr. Dodwell † has chosen to say, that most of the tumultuary proceedings, arose from a wish to curry favour with the government. This observation, is a specimen of the temper of his essay. The assertion is, entirely a *gratis dictum*; and evidently hazarded, only for the purpose of favouring his cause.

* Gibbon, chap. XVI.

† De Pauc. Martyr. § 10.

‘The popular attacks, were made to please governments; but very few of the emperors were ill disposed to the Christians; *therefore*, these popular attacks must have been *very few*.’

Note 9. P. 34. line 1. ‘*blindness and ignorance*.’

THE extract from Neander, in the last note, will shew what I mean here. It is Tertullian who says *, that if the Nile did not fertilize Egypt, if there was an earthquake, &c. &c., the cry was, immediately, that the Christians were to be thrown to the lions. Cyprian, again, begins his treatise, *ad Demetrianum*, with shewing the folly and injustice, of charging all the evils, which occurred in the course of nature, famine, earthquake, &c. upon the Christians †.

Note 10. P. 35. line 1. ‘*Opinions*.’

THE facility of communication between the distant parts of the Roman empire, was extreme. There were roads from the North of England to Jerusalem, viz. for about 3740 English miles, comprising the two passages from Sandwich to Boulogne, and from Brindisi to Durazzo. Mr. Gibbon observes, that they were, in the first instance, intended to facilitate the movement of the troops, and, thus, to confirm the Roman conquests. Post-horses were established in relays, at easy distances; by which the traveller could go 100 miles a day ‡.

‘The easy communication in the enormous Roman empire; the connection of the Jews, dispersed in all countries,

* Apol. 40.

† See Cyprian, p. 185, et seq. ed. Fell.

‡ See Gibbon, Ch. ii. notes 85–92, or Bergier Histoire des Grands Chemins de l’Empire Romain.

with Jerusalem; the connection of all parts of the Roman empire, with the great metropolis; the connection of each province, with its own metropolis; and that of the greater divisions of the Roman empire, with the greater capitals, which were mediums of mercantile, political, and literary intercourse, as Alexandria, Antioch, Ephesus, and Corinth; which places were, also, main points for the propagation of the Gospel; in which, its first teachers lived longest; the commercial intercourse which, since old times, served for the communication not only of earthly goods, but of the higher mental treasures,—might serve now as means for the communication of the highest.—On the whole, Christianity was spread first in the cities; for, as the object was, to gain fresh places for the spreading the Gospels, its preachers must have first proclaimed it in the towns; from whence, it might be spread more easily, through the country, by native preachers*.’

Note 11. P. 35. line 18. ‘*To receive it.*’

THE exact time of the origin of the Churches of Vienne and Lyons, is unknown; but the persecution there, took place as early as A.D. 177.

Note 12. P. 36. line 1. ‘*Country to a desert.*’

PLINY’S well known letter to Trajan, states, that the temples were almost deserted; that the sacred victims scarcely found any purchasers; and that Christianity had spread, even into the villages, and open country of Pontus and Bithynia.

* Neander, Allg. Gesch. vol. i. p. 109.

‘We know,’ says Neander *, ‘from the account of Pliny to Trajan, from the notice in Clemens †, and from the relations of Justin ‡, that, in many neighbourhoods, there were country communities of Christians, very early; and Origen says expressly §, that many made a point of going through, not only the towns, but the *κωμαι και ἐπανλεις*. The great number of *Χωρεπισκοποι*, in particular neighbourhoods, likewise, prove this.’

From a passage in Lucian’s *Alexander* ||, it appears, that when that impostor, who, at first, had obtained great success, was afterwards attacked, he said, that Pontus was full of *Atheists and Christians*. This was about A.D. 180.

In the time of Theodosius, there were 100,000 Christians belonging to the Church at Antioch ¶.

The early introduction of Christianity into Alexandria is well known. Mr. Gibbon chooses to assert, that it was confined to that city, till the close of the second century. But we find (from Euseb. VI. 1.), that, at that very period, a persecution of the Christians in *the Thebais* took place, under Septimius Severus. And Tertullian sufficiently shows, that the Church of Carthage was in a flourishing state, at the very same period **. ‘Obsessam vociferantur civitatem, in agris, in castellis, in insulis Christianos, omnem sexum, ætatem, conditionem, et jam dignitatem transgredi ad hoc nomen.’ Neander observes, that in the middle of the next century, at a meeting at Carthage, there were 87 bishops present ††.

Mosheim ‡‡ points out, with great acuteness, the classes of

* Allg. Gesch. vol. i. p. 111.

† Ep. 1. ad Cor. c. 42.

‡ Apol. ii. 98.

§ C. Cels. iii. p. 119.

|| C. 25.

¶ Chrysostom. op. vii. p. 658, 810.

** See Apol. c. 1.

†† Vol. i. p. 118.

‡‡ De Rebus, &c. Sæc. ii. § iv. and notes.

persons, who wish to diminish the power of early Christians, and their reasons for wishing to do so.

Note 13. P. 36. line 18. ‘*For any great purpose.*’

WE find, that, at the final departure of the Romans from Britain, Christianity was well spread through the country; and we have meetings of bishops, at that period, recorded. It is said, that the Christians in England had suffered much, by the persecutions; but, at all events, it appears, that, on the Saxon conquest, ‘Heathenism was the prevailing religion, and kept pace with the Saxon conquest; yea, almost over-spread the whole land: the Church lost ground every where; and was driven, as it were, into a corner; and no where was visible, to any degree, excepting in Wales, Cornwall, and Cumberland; for, in these parts, the Britons had still some footing *.’

Note 14. P. 42. line 12. ‘*Those disguises.*’

For full satisfaction, I would refer the reader to the two recent treatises, of Neander and Matter, on Gnosticism.

On the two principles, see Mosheim de Rebus, &c. Sec. i. p. 61, 62. Matter, Histoire Univ. vol. i. p. 166.

On the esoteric, and exoteric doctrines, Mosheim, ubi supra, § 63. Neander, vol. ii. p. 629.

On the sects of the Gnostics, Mosheim ubi supra, § 64 and following. Matter, Histoire Univ. vol. i. p. 166—172, where the subject is, clearly, though concisely, handled. Neander † gives a longer, and fuller account.

On the bad morals of the Gnostics, Mosheim ubi supra,

* Miller’s Propagation, vol. ii. p. 76.

† Allg. Gesch. vol. i. p. 627.

Sec. ii. § 11 and 41. The place in Irenæus alluded to, is, 1. adv. Hær. c. 25.; those of Justin are, Dial. c. Tryph. p. 101. 244. 249. ed. Jebb.

M. Matter, after noticing the minor sects which harassed the outset of Christianity, and the attempts to unite Judaism and Christianity, as shown in the Nazarene and the Ebionite sects, observes, that mischievous as all these were, they were but the prelude of a far more fearful defection; which showed itself, even at the end of the first century, and which was foreseen by the apostles. When they saw, that Judaism introduced into Christianity, such heterogeneous elements, they must have foreseen, that Paganism, in its turn, would endeavour to bestow on Christianity, its philosophy, its mythology, and its mysteries. They could, however, hardly have imagined, that such an innumerable quantity of sects, entertaining notions so absolutely opposed to each other, would rise in the bosom of the same Church*.

The following remarks, by the same author, deserve attention:

‘ Les associations gnostiques, se multipliant ainsi à l’infini, ne pouvaient que désoler les Chrétiens. Il est vrai, que malgré toutes ses dissidences, il y eut encore, dans la marche des deux sociétés, des analogies frappantes, tant est puissant l’élément divin de la religion Chrétienne; cependant, si le mysticisme des spéculations, et le rigorisme des pratiques, marchèrent souvent de pair dans les deux camps, la profonde anti-moralité de quelques docteurs gnostiques, dût remplir d’horreur les docteurs orthodoxes. Peut-être, de leur part, un autre sentiment d’hostilité vint-il se réunir à cette horreur. Les gnostiques, à la richesse, à l’éclat de

* Hist. Univ. vol. i. p. 166.

leurs doctrines, à l'enthousiasme qui les animait pour elles, joignaient, encore, les ressources d'une profonde érudition, les prestiges d'une thaumaturgie artificieusement combinée, et, si nous en croyons le sévère Irénée, les séductions des intrigues galantes. Ils acquirent, par tous ces moyens, une telle influence, et se firent une telle foule des partisans, qu'ils passèrent souvent pour les Chrétiens par excellence. Ils jetèrent, cependant, par leur culte, leur mœurs, et toutes leurs aberrations, une telle défaveur sur la société Chrétienne, que l'on comprend facilement, la véhémence, souvent injuste, avec laquelle les défenseurs de l'Eglise orthodoxe les combattent.'—P. 171.

I have often, I confess, been inclined to think, that the emersion of pure Christianity, so to speak, from errors so very widely spread among those who should have been the great supporters of the cause of gnosticism, and who were so eminently calculated to corrupt and destroy, was, of itself, a sufficient proof of the truth of the religion.

Some observations of Mr. Hinds may, also, be useful :

' At this season, however, the church began to feel the influence of a more powerful enemy, perhaps, than the sword of persecution. It was not now, so much an adulterous union between the Mosaic law and the Christian, as between gentile philosophy and Christian truth, against which, the defender of the faith had to contend. And here, it might be expected, that, at least, the Judaizing portion of the church, would have been firm resisters against this most unnatural union : but they were, perhaps, the weaker party ; and were even more readily seduced, than their brethren of gentile origin. The reason was this : with the Jews of Alexandria, and, through them, very generally

with the Jews of all parts, the experiment which was now to be tried on the Christians, had been made, and made with eminent success. Long before the establishment of the eclectic sect in Egypt, the principles on which it was formed, had influenced the philosophical speculations at Alexandria : and several tenets of the Greek wisdom, had been admitted into the Oriental schools ; and still more of Orientalism, into those of the Grecian philosophy. Plato's system, from its fanciful assemblage of IDEAS, was the most readily identified or amalgamated, with the Eastern theory of emanations. But the peripatetic and stoic, were soon found equally pliant and yielding, to the ingenuity of men, once practised in the method of harmonizing and reconciling. Both, no less than the academic, coincided, indeed, in the fundamental point of theology, with the Eastern creed ; viz. that the Deity was the soul of the world, or the universe itself. The Epicurean system was the most stubborn ; but even this was gradually tortured, until it was made to furnish some evidence, to the shifting views of these theorists. Meanwhile, in this rage for philosophic liberality, the ancient and august character of the Mosaic revelation, and the reverence with which it was observed, by so large a portion of the inhabitants of Alexandria, especially, the great laboratory in which all these experimentalists were at work,—could not but tempt them, to tamper with this institution also. Many of the Jews were persuaded into a notion, that part of the Gentile theories, must have been portions of patriarchal revelation ; and worthy of being believed, and applied to the elucidation of the Mosaic. The infection had spread, far and wide, through the nation, at the period of the Messiah's coming ; and many of those Jews who became converts to

Christianity, carried with them into the church the tenets and spirit of gnosticism. Even during the ministry of St. Paul, we recognize the use of the word *gnosis*, (γνῶσις,) applied, as it began to be, to an *esoteric* doctrine; a refined and cabalistic interpretation of the Gospel; a system which, in the apostle's own words, was "falsely called *gnosis*, or knowledge" *.

'Before the close of the first century, however, the warning voice of (S.) Paul required the support, of the last survivor of the apostles. The "foolish questions," and the "endless genealogies," from which the former had sought to divert the attention of the Christian inquirer, were becoming, more and more, objects of interest. Foolish questions or inquiries, into the absolute nature of God, led (as they must ever lead men) to absurdity and impiety; to those wild speculations, concerning the successive generations of Enos,—the emanations of the Divine Essence—and all the metaphysical subtleties of Orientalism, which St. John, briefly, and in the spirit of one dismissing idle discussion, by a few authoritative assertions, adverts to, in the commencement of his Gospel †.'

'The artful founders of Gnosticism, in recommending the Oriental philosophy to the Jews, originally, were sensible of the difficulty; they perceived, that it was not enough, in this case, as in the attempts to reconcile their system with that of Plato, or Aristotle, or Zeno, to make its several parts harmonize, and represent those of the other. There was one ingredient wanting, which neither Orientalism, nor any human system of religion claimed or rested on; an

* 1 Tim. vi. 20. i. 4. Tit. iii. 9. Coloss. ii. 8.

† Hinds's Rise and Progress, vol. ii. p. 46. et seq.

ingredient, peculiar to the truth, and that was,—evidence. In order to supply this want, it was found expedient, to challenge as authority, the very same source to which the Jews themselves were accustomed to appeal. These secrets of revelation, they pretended, had been given from the beginning; together with what was contained in the Jewish Scripture. Adam, they said, received it; the Patriarchs received it; and, through them, it was communicated to certain ancient sages, the especial confidants and guardians of holy wisdom. Whilst Divine faith was presented to mankind in a homely garb, suited to vulgar apprehensions, this key to its real nature, was thus preserved in the keeping of a few*; in short, this, according to their representation, was the *Esoteric* doctrine of religion, as that contained in Scripture, had been the *Exoteric*. Recalled, for testimony, to an early age, to names of whom a blind reverence made it nearly blasphemy to doubt aught; and, probably, so bewildered in their view of the question, as to confound scepticism, concerning the fact of these holy men having received the communications pretended, with doubt as to the validity of their evidence, if given to such a fact, what wonder that many should fall into the snare? The experience of every age justifies the great historian of Greece, in the conclusion to which he was led, by his attempts to ascertain the grounds, on which, so much idle fable had been received as truth, by his countrymen†. Men will not take the trouble to search after truth, if any thing like it is ready provided to their hands; and from this fate, religious truth itself is not exempted‡.

* Bruckeri. Hist. Philosophiæ, tom. ii. p. 924—949.

† Lib. I. chap. 20.

‡ Hinds, ubi supra. p. 58.

Note 15. P. 43. line 8. ‘*Our forefathers.*’

‘FROM all these idle and impious fancies, engendered as it would seem, in the full sunshine of truth, we should turn aside with little remembrance, if recorded of an individual alone; but the attention is detained, and reason is staggered, at the record of numbers joining in a view of revelation such as this; combining through centuries, like the successful builders of a spiritual Babel; and so established in their creed, as to branch out into subdivisions and sects, all maintaining the great principles of Gnosticism. It is the feeling of each age, to be amazed and scandalized at the absurdity or impiety of notions worn out by time; even while it is itself, perhaps, affording matter for the reprehension and scorn of future generations. Scarce less contempt and censure do we pass on the Gnostics of old, than did those Gnostics, on the idol-worshippers, from whose impurities and vanities they had extricated themselves. On us, and on every age, the moral presses strongly and beneficially. Other prejudices than those of a ‘vain philosophy’ may betray the Christians of the 19th century, and of ages more enlightened still, into errors equally unworthy of the name he bears, and of the God whom he worships. Collectively as a Church, no less than as individuals, we are to the end of time in a state of trial; and it is well to look on these monstrous pictures of the past, if the retrospect suggests to us, that the best safeguard which we now possess, the aid of the Holy Spirit, was their’s no less than our’s’*.

* Hind’s History of the Rise and Early Progress of Christianity, vol. ii. p. 56.

Note 16. P. 44. line 24.

MOSHEIM* observes, that in the course of the second century, the study of the Pagan philosophy, which seems to have been previously providentially kept from the Christians, was pursued with great vehemence: that the philosophers, who became Christians, retained their names, dress, and way of living, and recommended the study to the young. The catechetical school of Alexandria, perhaps, must be esteemed the first and leading of the schools of Christian Philosophy. Pantænus, Athenagoras, and Clemens Alexandrinus, who were at the head of it, recommended this study to all with whom they had any influence.

It appears from the passages from Clemens quoted in Mosheim's note, that he had no hesitation in saying, that the Greek Philosophy proceeded from God—that it was (before the coming of our Lord) the way to salvation—that it was to the Greeks what the Jewish law was to the Jews—that he was anxious to deliver Christian truth wrapped up in Greek philosophy.

What contentions among the Christians these lessons caused, may be seen in Mosheim, *ubi supra*, § 26.

Note 17. P. 45. line 7. '*Fifth century.*'

THERE is some difficulty in determining exactly when Montanism was first heard of, and the particulars of Montanus's own life are very scanty. It seems, however, that it was soon after the middle of the second century †. Some

* De Rebus, &c. Sæc. ii. § 25.

† See Neander's Allg. Gesch. vol. iii. p. 874. and his book on Tertullian, p. 486.

notice of the establishment of Montanist communities, of its opposers, and the Synods convoked respecting it, may be found in the first of these works, p. 894—897.

Not only did the Montanists *last* till the fifth century, but they were in that century still of such importance, that no less than five severe edicts were sent forth against them in the earlier part of that century. Mosheim* refers to the Cod. Theod. T. vi. p. 168. 177. 182. 186. 200. and 202.

Gibbon† says, ‘at the end of 400 years the Montanists of Phrygia still breathed the wild enthusiasm of perfection and prophecy, &c. &c. On the approach of the Catholic priests and soldiers’ (he is speaking of Justinian’s persecution, A.D. 519—560,) ‘they grasped with alacrity the crown of martyrdom; the conventicle and the congregation perished in the flames, but these primitive fanatics were not extinguished 300 years after the death of their tyrant.’

Note 18. P. 45. line 12. ‘*Investigating the truth.*’

THE following passage from M. Matter ‡ will probably be sufficient:

‘Malgré ces variations, les Manichéens se repandirent en Orient et en Occident avec une rapidité effrayante pour les Orthodoxes. C’était une époque favorable à leur succès que celle où les générations les plus instruites professaient le penchant le plus prononcé pour les antiques théories de l’Orient converties en nouvelles théosophies par les sages

* De Rebus, &c. Sæc. ii. § 66. note 4.

† Ch. xlvii. vol. iv. p. 379. 4to. ed.

‡ Histoire Univ. I. p. 176. See also a concise account of them in Neander, Allg. Gesch. I. 2. p. 813—854. Of course, I need not mention the well-known work of Beausobre.

de nos premières siècles. La persécution si longue et, pour ainsi dire, si universelle, dont les Manichéens ont été l'objet de la part des Rois de Perse, des Empereurs de Rome païenne et des Empereurs de la nouvelle Rome, ont pu disperser cette secte, en paralyser les progrès, en diminuer les élèves, mais pendant des siècles rien ne fut assez puissant pour l'extirper elle-même. Unie dans l'Orient avec la gnose Syrienne, en Occident avec la gnose de l'Égypte, elle se maintint, et en Orient et en Occident, tantôt en secret, tantôt publiquement, et reparut souvent au moyen âge, tantôt en Italie, tantôt en France, tantôt dans d'autres pays.'

Note 19. P. 47. line 26. '*expiring Christianity*.'

A VERY good account of the schism of Donatus, (which at first arose from a mere question of discipline, viz. whether Cæcilianus, who had been named and consecrated bishop of Carthage, without the consent of the Numidian bishops, and consecrated by a person accused of having delivered up the Scriptures in the persecution of Decius, should be received as bishop, being opposed by the Numidian bishops, who elected Majorinus, and subsequently Donatus) will be found in M. Matter, I. p. 399, and in Neander, Allg. Gesch. II. 1. p. 387-463. See also Gibbon, chap. xxi. This schism broke out A.D. 311, and in 330, the Donatists held a synod, which consisted of 270 bishops, and in A.D. 394, one of 310*! In A.D. 411, we find a conference between 279 Donatist and 186 Orthodox bishops. The schism lasted down to the invasion of Africa by the Mussulmans.

* Jortin IV. p. 137. (ed. 1773.)

‘It affected the provinces of Africa,’ says Gibbon, ‘for 300 years, and was extinguished only with Christianity itself.’

The schism of Felicissimus was of too short duration to do any real harm *. The schism of Meletius was a more serious one, and lasted above a century †. That of Novatian (which originated also in a mere question of discipline,) began in A.D. 261. It is known that there were congregations of Novatianists, not only in Africa but in Asia, at Constantinople, at Rome, in Spain and in Gaul, and that they continued in some force till the fifth century ‡.

Note 19 *. P. 48. line 7. ‘*the crescent on the other.*’

LET me briefly recall the *extent* of some of the heresies to which I have alluded in the last few pages. I need hardly add, that I only profess to notice the principal of them.

Arianism began at the commencement of the fourth century. The first general council on it (that of Nice) was held A.D. 325. It was embraced by the Emperor Constantius in one of its many forms, and the power which he possessed was exerted in its favour. The Goths, Visigoths, Ostrogoths, Burgundians, Suevi, and Vandals, as well as much of the ancient population of Christendom, embraced it for a time, so that, as Matter §, observes, it would almost seem to have been the religion of the majority. Nor was its reign a brief one. It was not till A.D. 524, that the

* See Matter, Hist. Univ. I. p. 201, and foll. Neander, Allg. Gesch. I. 1. p. 360—387. Jortin, (II. 106) talks of their lasting 200 years.

† See Neander II. 1. p. 463—471.

‡ See Mosheim, de Rebus, &c. saec III. § 15, note 4. Neander ubi supra p. 387—407.

§ Vol. I. p. 336.

churches in the empire were taken from them. The Burgundians and Vandals were converted in 534; the Suevi in 559; the Visigoths in 589; the Lombards in 671.

Such a heresy, of such an extent, and such an endurance, must, of necessity, have checked the progress of truth, and it was in its progress that the spirit of religious persecution was first shown, a yet more fatal clog to the propagation of Christianity than heresy. Matter * has observed, with great acuteness, (and the observation must interest those who are inclined to speculate on the dealings of Providence in permitting such a heresy,) that ‘après tout, ce n’est ni les prélats, ni les princes, c’est bien moins la société Chrétienne, qu’il faut accuser des graves aberrations de ces tems, c’est la condition de la nature humaine, qui a besoin de s’essayer, d’apprendre à passer des erreurs à la vérité. En effet tout est neuf dans l’empire, au moment où le paganisme cesse d’y régner, où commence la domination des Chrétiens, de leur clergé, où les Goths et les Vandales se partagent les conquêtes des Scipion et des Cesar. Quel moyen que, dans ce chaos, chacun reconnaisse sa compétence; quel moyen que là on discute les doctrines comme ferait un aréopage de philosophes, nés adorateurs des principes, et esclaves des conséquences? Là, au contraire, l’épiscopat et l’empire, le talent et le paradoxe, l’érudition et l’erreur, doivent nous présenter le spectacle d’une lutte chaotique, vive et rude, d’une lutte d’ailleurs aussi instructive pour la postérité que désolante pour les contemporains. Telle est en effet l’histoire des doctrines de ces tems.’

Without a miraculous interference in the affairs of man, error must work out *its own cure*; and it is part of the

* Hist. Univ. I. p. 328.

scheme of a moral Government, that it should infallibly do so.

We may observe, that Arianism showed on its face the marks of falsehood, and nourished in its bosom the seeds of decay. I allude to its constant *variations of creed*. ‘Ce qui perdit,’ says Matter *, ‘la cause des Ariens, ce ne fut pas la seule législation de Byzance, ou la colère de la cour, cette perpétuelle variation de symboles, ce *labyrinthe* de professions de foi, que leur reproche un ancien historien, et dont ils portèrent le nombre *de onze à dix-huit* en peu d’années ; ce fut enfin, la violence de leurs passions. D’ailleurs, si l’impartiale histoire censure sévèrement leurs aberrations, elle relève aussi les fautes du côté opposé, et rend d’éclatans hommages aux talens, aux vertus, et à quelques parties du culte des Ariens.’

Gibbon’s remarks † are worth transcribing. ‘The sincerity or the cunning of the Arian chiefs, the fear of the laws, or of the people, their reverence for Christianity, their hatred of Athanasius, all the causes human and divine, that influence and disturb the counsels of a theological faction, introduced among the sectaries a spirit of discord and inconstancy which, in the course of a few years, erected eighteen different models of religion, and avenged the violated dignity of the church. The zealous Hilary, who, from the peculiar hardness of his situation, was inclined to extenuate, rather than to aggravate, the errors of the Oriental clergy, declares, that in the wide extent of the ten provinces of Asia, to which he had been banished, there could be found

* Vol. I. p. 334.

† Chap. XXI. Vol. II. p. 254.

very few prelates who had preserved the knowledge of the true God.'

Before the death of Arius, or immediately after, there were already three leading divisions of his followers. The pure Arians, under Ætius and Eunomius, the semi-Arians, to which Constantius belonged, publicly established A.D. 341, and the Acacians. Arius died A.D. 336*.

The Macedonian heresy began about A.D. 351, and was condemned in the council of Constantinople, A.D. 361.

Nestorius was made patriarch of Constantinople, A.D. 428. Council after council was called with respect to this heresy, and frightful scenes of violence were exhibited by the opposite parties. It is supposed that Nestorius died about A.D. 451. From the school of Nisibis, established by one of his followers, Barsumas, soon after the issuing of the Henoticon of Zeno, missionaries went into Egypt, Syria, Arabia, India, Tartary and Persia. In Persia, a patriarchate was established by the Nestorians, in A.D. 489, which lasted for a very long period.

Gibbon says, that 'in Justinian's time, it was difficult to find a church of Nestorians within the limits of the Roman empire. But beyond those limits, they had discovered a new world, in which they might hope for liberty, and aspire to conquest.' After pointing out their entire mastery of Persia, Gibbon goes on to say, that, 'in the sixth century, according to a Nestorian traveller, the Nestorian faith was successfully preached to the Bactrians, the Huns, Indians, Persarmenians, Medes, Elamites: the barbaric churches from the Gulf of Persia to the Caspian Sea, were *almost*

* See F. Spanheim, *Introd. ad. H. N. T.* p. 410.

infinite; the pepper coast of Malabar, and the isles of the ocean, Socotera and Ceylon, were peopled with an increasing multitude of Christians.' He then mentions the missionaries going into Tartary and China; and that under the caliphs, the sect spread from China to Jerusalem, and with the Jacobites, was reckoned to surpass the Greek and Latin churches. There were twenty-five archbishops, dependant on the *Catholic* or *Patriarch* of Babylon. They are now, he says, reduced to the *Elijahs* of Mogul, the *Josephs* of Anuda, (reconciled to Rome,) and the *Simeons* of Ormia, and are reckoned at 300,000*.

The heresy of Eutyches involved the church in confusion for above thirty years, from A.D. 448, to A.D. 482 †.

Pelagianism arose in A.D. 405, and was condemned in various councils in the course of that century. It seems to have triumphed in the synods of Arles and Lyons, in A.D. 472, and we find it in Provence in A.D. 529, and in Britain in the fifth century ‡. Matter, in concluding his remarks on this sect, adds, that 'the Predestinarians, though their number was small, formed with the Arians, Nestorians, Monophysites, and different parties which emanated from these sects, divisions quite distressing enough to afflict the Christian church very deeply, and *consume in internal wars* those moral forces §, which, without them, would have gone beyond the limits of Christianity, and would have shed on the neighbouring nations the benefits

* See Gibbon, chap. XLVII. Matter, Hist. Univ. vol. I. p. 345—353.

† See Gibbon, chap. XLVII. Matter ubi supra, p. 354—359.

‡ See Gibbon, chap. XXXI. Vol. III. p. 278. 4to. Matter, Hist. Univ. vol. I. p. 369.

§ Edwards observes, very justly, that all these heresies followed heathenism, and were thus a fresh enemy. See p. 311.

which their barbarous ignorance so loudly demanded.' He adds, that sects of various kinds and orders existed in different points of the empire, for a very long period; that the Gnostics expired only in the eighth century; the Manichæans still maintained themselves, and that in Spain, there rose from the remains of the Gnostics and Manichæans, a new sect called the Priscillianists*.

Note 20. P. 48. line 22. '*claims to attention.*'

SEE some admirable remarks by Neander †, which I had intended to give here, but I find my notes growing too large. See too some remarks by Bishop Bradford, in his Sermon before the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, page 23, and the whole of Campbell's 3d Lecture on Ecclesiastical History, vol. i. p. 46.

Note 21. P. 49. line 5. '*sneering divine.*'

IT is painful to speak with severity of the dead. But I think Jortin's work on Ecclesiastical History calculated to do great mischief, by strengthening the habit, which prevails among us, of searching out for what is base in fact or purpose in the character and conduct of every person under consideration, and by strengthening the miserable taste, equally prevalent, of treating all subjects in a spirit of flippancy. They who have read Jortin can hardly want any citations in justification of these remarks. History, especially the history of religion, should be written in a spirit of love to mankind; with a deep interest in their

* Matter, vol. I. p. 369, 370. On the Priscillianists. See Gibbon III. 26. Jortin IV. 84—95. (ed. 1773.)

† Allg. Gesch. II. 1. p. 280.

welfare, sometimes it may be with indignation at, but always with deep sorrow for their follies, and their faults. Jortin's account of it is *, that ecclesiastical history, 'like other history, is for the most part a register of the vices, the follies, and the quarrels of those who made a figure and noise in the world.' He has only left out one particular in this enumeration, their virtues.

But he seems in this work to have felt admiration and love for no man. If men did what was wrong, he is merciless; if what is right, he insinuates a mean or selfish intention †. In the thoughtful mind, the pain which would be caused, if such representations were true, is supplanted by the indignation which arises from the certainty that they are false; from the certainty that with the too prevalent evil there was mingled much of redeeming good, if the writer had not wanted the feeling to discern, for I will not accuse him of wanting the candour, to express it.

But let us look at this work in another point of view, and see the author's inability to grasp the features of the times which he undertakes to describe. His great aim seems to be, and no doubt it is a very laudable one, to recommend toleration. But he never makes any allowance for difficult circumstances, for barbarous ages, for temporary exasperation, for the sometimes unwished for interference of secular men, or of spiritual persons of secular minds, compelling an unwilling union in their unholy purposes. He writes in

* Close of the second volume, or in the edition of 1805, vol. II. p. 154.

† Thus when a high priest appointed by Julian, and other philosophers, forbore to persecute the Christians, it was only because 'they foresaw, without the help of magic, the revolution which might probably soon ensue. These rats did not care to sail in a rotten ship.' Vol. iii. p. 13. Toleration exercised by a Pagan would surely have been spared, if the writer could have spared any thing.

his quiet study, as if every thing had been as quiet for 1700 years as the shelves around him; and seems to think it as atrocious and as surprising for a patriarch of Alexandria, or a bishop of Rome, living in the fourth or fifth century, in the midst of the most frightful and bloody civic turmoils, to have got rid of a violent and dangerous enemy by exile or imprisonment, as it would have been in himself as Arch-deacon of London in the eighteenth.

The language again is such as is never used in decent society; nay! the author seems to have had a pleasure in using the coarsest words, and enforcing them often with the most disgusting quotations*. Knave, fool, booby, ruffian, and wretch, are the pearls which are cast with a lavish hand over the pages of his work, mixed with coarse apophthegms, expressed in the coarsest terms.

To gain an idea of the flippant spirit with which every thing is treated, the perusal of any half dozen pages will suffice. It may be enough to refer to what the writer says about Simon Magus and Basilides, very near the commencement of his work, about the Saints and Monks†, and to his observations on Bossuet‡. Being angry with Bossuet for speaking against Grotius, he says, 'It is one thing to be bishop of Meaux, and another to be Hugo Grotius.' Never surely was flippancy more misapplied. Whether Bossuet were of as great abilities as Grotius may be matter of dispute. But with all his faults (and he had, I fear, many) he was a marvellous man. What learning, what eloquence, what ingenuity, what industry, what acuteness in his various works! Who would have spoken with con-

* See, as a single instance, what he says of Evagrius. Vol. ii. p. 252.

† Vol. i. p. 263. (ed. 1805.)

‡ Vol. iii. p. 259 and following.

tempt of the author of the Exposition, the Histoire des Variations, the Sermons and Orations, and the Commentaries.

Note 22. P. 49. line 18. ‘*To the ear of faith.*’

THOUGH Jortin chooses * to call a good Bishop ‘a great rarity;’ they who read with a more candid spirit, will not confirm his remark. It is a singular fact, that within six pages of that which I have referred to, and within 30 years of the date 481, he himself enumerates two bishops of Carthage, a bishop of Constantinople, and of Alexandria, to whom he allows that history gives good characters, and against whom he finds nothing to allege, so that the case is pretty clear; and of one of whom (the first,) he speaks in as strong terms of approbation, I think, as he ever uses. Besides which we find, in the same space, a bishop of Antioch quietly resigning his See, because the people disliked him, and a ‘learned and candid’ presbyter.’

Let us call to mind, even after the age of the apostolic fathers, the admirable and excellent men who adorned the Church of God by their lives and often by their deaths. Make what allowance must be made for their faults, and then consider the characters of Origen, Gregory Thaumaturgus, Cyprian, Theodoret †, and Chrysostom. A lengthened enumeration is of course out of the question here.

We may observe, that Amm. Marcellinus ‡, when speaking against Damasus, bears decided testimony to the humility and piety of Provincial bishops. Jortin himself, speaks §

* Vol iii. p. 31.

† See his character of his clergy too in his Ep. 81 and 113, as quoted by Jortin, II. 250.

‡ XXVII. 3.

§ Vol. ii. p. 146.

of 'many worthy and pious bishops' suffering martyrdom in Dioclesian's persecution.

Note 23. P. 50. line 1. '*Rulers in the Church of God.*'

WE may surely note here that evil prelates are to be reckoned among the serious evils to the cause of Christianity, and the serious obstacles to its propagation.

Such seem to have been, for example, Paul of Samosata, George of Cappadociâ, Damasus of Rome, and Dioscorus.

CHAPTER III.



Note 1. P. 55. line 16. ‘*Proved by experience.*’

I AM most happy in being able to refer here to the authority of my friend Mr. Forster, of Limerick, and to have this opportunity of offering him my public thanks for his invaluable work called ‘Mahometanism Unveiled;’ the first work (as even they who may not agree in the theory which it develops, must allow) which has looked fairly and fully at the *real* phænomena of Mahometanism, done justice to that singular religion, and tracing (with equal beauty, ingenuity, and learning) the benefits which it has bestowed on the cause of civilization, supplied the pious and thoughtful mind with ample materials for speculating on the dealings of Providence, and tracing its beneficent operation in the eduction of good from evil.

He observes, that ‘the admission has been fairly made by some of the ablest advocates of the Gospel, that a high state of national culture and civilization would seem essential, in order to Christianity striking root, and becoming permanently established among any people. It may be remarked in confirmation of this opinion, that the limits of *permanent* Christianity have, in fact, being hitherto nearly commensurate with the boundaries of Greek and Roman civilization. It is very true that in the apostolic age, and at its primitive announcement, the blessed and glorious

Gospel had penetrated into the savage climates, and among the barbarian nations of the ancient world. The early triumphs of Christianity in these quarters, are, however, sufficiently accounted for, by the consideration that its first preachers carried with them the sensible and visible sanction of miracles; of supernatural gifts and powers, perhaps the only kind of appeal at once perfectly adapted to the capacity, and peculiarly in unison with the religious instinct of uncivilized men *.' Mr. Forster goes on to confirm these remarks by observing, that 'the apostolical preaching left no *lasting* national impression among the Scythians or other barbarians of the North,' that although the Pagan invaders of the Roman empire became Christians, yet they were, in fact, blended into one people with their civilized subjects; that the reduction of the North (of Germany) was effected by force of arms, and that neither Tartary nor Arabia ever admitted Christianity as the national religion. I recommend to the reader's careful perusal Mr. Forster's notes on this portion of his work. And I transcribe with pleasure the sentiments which he has already transcribed from Bishop Law:

'Christianity could not have been propagated otherwise than in fact, it was and is; namely, in a *gradual, progressive, partial* manner. Let it be *proclaimed* at first ever so far and wide, yet the *reception* and *continuance* of it must depend upon the dispositions of mankind, both natural and moral. Some previous as well as concomitant

* So Hall, (Bampton Lectures, p. 266.) adding that the missionary has *now* no extraordinary assistance; and that we may surely thence infer that if the task of instruction be left to human agents, and *extraordinary* help withdrawn, some previous knowledge must be necessary to form the mind of the convert.

qualifications are requisite to the due *exercise* and influence of it, as well in private men as public states and communities; so that among a people sunk in barbarity and ignorance, in places where there is no kind of good order or government established; no regular forms of education established; where there is an universal want of discipline, and dissoluteness, there Christianity cannot subsist. Ignorant, uncivilized, slavish, and brutish nations are equally incapable of receiving such an institution, as they are of all those other sciences, arts, or improvements, which polish and adorn the rest of mankind, and make life a blessing.

‘By being incapable of receiving it, I mean incapable of receiving it with effect; of retaining or applying it to any valuable purpose, for which men do not seem properly qualified, notwithstanding any natural capacity without aid from the liberal arts, and other accomplishments, in some degree. Most of the Indians are, I doubt not, capable of understanding the main principles of our faith, at the first proposal*, but scarcely qualified, I think, to make a *right* use, and receive the *salutary effects* thereof, to let it sink deep into the heart, and form the temper; *for want of some farther pains being taken*, to implant worthy principles of civil government and social life amongst them; without

* Mr. Forster thinks that this may be questioned. The difficulty of course, in all cases, is to draw the line beyond which positive barbarism commences. Wherever it has commenced, I cannot but assent to Mr. Forster’s remark. We are apt very often to bestow the name of savages on people who are very far from actual barbarism; as, for example, on the inhabitants of the Society Isles, who had a considerable knowledge of the arts of life, as appears both from Mr. Ellis’s *Polynesian Researches* and earlier works. I would recommend the reader to refer to Capt. Basil Hall’s late work on *America*, vol. iii. p. 233, and following, for some very instructive remarks on the slow progress of instruction among slaves.

which all endeavours to introduce the purest and most perfect system of religion seems preposterous.'

The bishop adds with equal justice, that 'the exercise of the senses by reason of use, the discerning good and evil, the enlargement and improvement of the rational faculties, and the cultivation and refinement of the natural genius, are necessary to the reception of Christianity; and that the extreme absurdities, and childish ignorance of the Chinese in many things, testify that this is not their state, notwithstanding the fine things which have been said of them, and, therefore, accounts for their not receiving the Gospel.'—
P. 32, 33.

'Upon no other supposition whatever,' (than that of a constant miracle) 'can we conceive the general diffusion of the great truths of Christianity, without any preparation, any previous moral discipline, or any foundation of knowledge. Follow the missionary into the hut of the Indian,' and observe what a fruitless task it is to preach the cross of Christ crucified, to bid the savage repent, and confess his sins, and be baptized into the faith of the blessed Jesus. What impression can such a summons make upon a mind that has never been taught to elevate its thoughts above the sensible objects immediately before it? From the teacher of heavenly truth he turns with contempt to the objects before him, to the glorious luminary, whose splendid orb he contemplates with astonishment, or even to the shapeless mass of wood or stone, which he conceives to be the residence of a Being superior in power to himself, who directs all the wonderful operations of nature, and rides in the storm and the whirlwind. And can we expect in such cir-

cumstances to find converts, rational and sincere converts to the Christian faith? Or is it any impeachment of the authenticity of the truth of the Gospel, that, when its doctrines have been preached to such hearers, they have either been unwilling to listen, or unable to comprehend them?

‘ We, who are Christians by education, who imbibe, in our very infancy the first rudiments of our faith, who receive it as an impression upon our minds, long before we are capable of examining its evidences, and believing upon conviction, we are scarcely competent judges of the difficulty of preaching the faith of Christ to those who have every thing to learn, and who, in some instances, do not possess even the great fundamental truths of natural religion*.’

What has been said here, will not, I trust, be misunderstood. If savages cannot receive Christianity, it may not be our duty to offer it to them; but if there is any meaning in our Lord’s command, that we are to preach the Gospel to all nations, it is unquestionably our duty to endeavour to make those who are yet unfit, fit for its reception. What I have said, therefore, releases us not from our duty; it merely alters the manner of performing it. If we cannot Christianize certain nations, without civilizing them, it is our duty to civilize them at whatever cost of pains or expense, and it is a duty from which nothing can release us. Our responsibility, as a commercial nation, engaged in intercourse with so many nations, for our gain, is truly awful, and our resolute and deliberate neglect of it, *as a nation*, cannot fail to awaken the bitterest feelings of fear and anguish in all Christian minds.

Since the above note was sent to press, I have had an

* Hall’s Bampton Lectures. Lect. IX.

opportunity of reading Mr. Ellis's *Polynesian Researches*, containing an account of the conversion of the people of Tahiti, and the neighbouring islands. Assuming Mr. Ellis's statements to be strictly correct, I yet do not find in them any contradiction of the positions here taken. Mr. Ellis laments that none of those who were on the spot, while the main efforts were making, have described those efforts, and I join in his expressions of regret. For, with every disposition to afford full information, his work is deficient in some very important particulars. The history of the *process* is almost a blank. Yet we gather some particulars which tend very much to corroborate what I have said.

It appears from Vol. I. p. 186, that the Gospel had been preached for some years in Tahiti, and that 'many of the people had imbibed a tolerably clear speculative knowledge of the leading doctrines,' before there was a single individual, on whom the missionaries could look as benefited by their instructions. When the missionaries, after a long absence, during which one only remained with the king, felt it safe to return, we find * that the king spent much of his time *in reading and writing*, and soon after professed Christianity. Some of his letters are given, page 195, and following.

In page 216 (in 1814) we find, that the desire for instruction had increased so much, that there were 200 scholars in the school at Papetoai, and they were obliged to send for elementary books to New South Wales.

Page 220, we find 300 scholars in Eimeo.

Page 223, 'Between forty or fifty, principally adults, regularly attended the mission school.'

* Vol. I. p. 188.

Page 242. Six or seven hundred pupils attended the school, and ‘want of books alone prevented its being very considerably enlarged.’

Page 263. Where they had not printed books, the most intelligent of the natives *wrote out* portions of Scripture.

Page 266. Not fewer than 3000 persons possessed a knowledge of the books in their native language, which were in daily use. Besides 800 copies of the abridgment of Scripture, and many of part of St. Luke in manuscript; about 2,700 spelling-books had already been distributed among the pupils at Eineo, or sent over to Tahiti.

P. 391. Many hundreds could read.

Thus, it appears, that there was a regular course of instruction in reading and writing, going on hand in hand with instruction in Christianity. What led immediately to a wish for this instruction does not appear.

Mr. Ellis, in commenting on the conversion *, seems to think, that the whole which was done was the work of the moment at which it happened. And he tells us, with respect to one of the Moravian missions, at Greenland, that after the missionaries had preached and inculcated the great principles of religion, for five or seven years, without effect, they found success by directing attention more especially to the history of our Lord; but in Tahiti, he could not find that any alteration had taken place from the beginning in the manner of preaching. Now, with respect to the Moravians, it is, surely, not reasonable to say, that the five or seven years preaching, because it had no visible effect, had no effect in preparing the people’s minds, and enabling them to profit by a still more judicious mode of

* Vol. I. p. 271, and following.

instruction. In Tahiti, we have seen, that many had a clear speculative knowledge of the great doctrines of Christianity, and that many were in a regular course of education. Are not these the proper preparations, and exactly such as might be expected in due time, under God's blessing, to produce the desired effect? And can they be overlooked in considering the subject? The question is not, be it remembered, whether the Lord's arm be shortened, but whether he has not, for wise reasons, left the business of conversion to human agents, with the promise of his blessing on proper means and zealous exertions. We may add, that Mr. Ellis observes *, that the skill shewn by the natives in building houses, their size, and conveniency, exhibits no small degree of invention, and skill, and shows, that they were even then far removed from a state of barbarism; and it is equally clear, from the whole of the work, that the Missionaries feel the extreme necessity of introducing a more ample measure of civilization, in order to keep up the salutary impression made on the islanders.

Note 2. P. 56. line 14. *'if not precede it.'*

'WHEREVER,' says Mr. Forster, 'Christian missionaries have produced any considerable effect among tribes wholly uncivilized, as in the case of the Jesuit settlements in Paraguay, and in that of Moravian missions at the Cape of Good Hope, civil improvement has been made to go hand in hand with religious instruction †.'

* Vol. I. p. 390.

† Mahom. Unveiled, vol. II. p. 520.

Note 3. P. 56. line 17. ‘*to receive them.*’

‘THE prefacer’ (to the translations of Le Comte’s Letters) ‘observes, that the Jesuits have adapted the systems of religion which they teach to the Chinese, according to the philosophy of Confucius, seldom teaching of Christ’s crucifixion, yea! allowing them to worship their pagodas*.’

On the toleration of idolatry in China and Malabar by the Jesuits, and their long controversy with the Popes on the point, see a curious book called ‘*Reflexions of a Portuguese,*’ or a full abstract of it in a work called *History of Jesuitism*, (in two vols. Lond. 1817.) vol. II. p. 312—333. See also the same work, II. p. 151, and the *Memoires Historiques du Pere Norbert*, Part I. Book V., where there is also an account of their toleration of Mahomedanism in Chio.

Note 4. P. 56. line 20. ‘*any other religion.*’

SEE Gibbon, chap. xxxviii.; and Walch’s Treatise ‘*De Clodovæo M. ex rationibus politicis Christiano.*’

Note 5. P. 59. line 7. ‘*inveterate against it.*’

THESE words are Mr. Davison’s, in his work on Prophecy, but I have lost the reference, and cannot procure the work at this moment.

Note 6. P. 61. line 14. ‘*cause of Christianity.*’

MOSHEIM † conjectures that Christianity was probably introduced into Britain by some of the same party from

* Millar’s *History of the Propagation*.

† *De Rebus*, &c. sæc. II. § III. note 3.

Asia Minor who took it to Vienne and Lyons. Neander * agrees with him in rejecting the story of the conversion of Lucius, a king of Britain, about A.D. 167 †, by missionaries sent by Eleutherus, bishop of Rome, on the ground that there is clear proof that the early English Christians had not received their Christianity from Rome, as they disagreed with the Romish Church in many particulars of ritual. On these points, and the coming of St. Paul to Britain, the reader must look to the regular works on the matter, Usher's *Antiquities*, I. p. 7., Stillingfleet's *Origines Britannicæ*, p. 39., Goodwin on the Conversion, &c. &c., Jeremy Collier and the other English historians.

Gildas ‡ says, that though the precepts of Christ were received lukewarmly § by the inhabitants, yet that some professed Christianity sincerely, and others partially, till Dioclesian's persecution.

We find three British bishops at the council of Rimini, A.D. 359, and Gibbon thinks, after Bingham ||, that when Britain separated from Rome, i. e. A.D. 409, there might be thirty or forty bishops, and an adequate proportion of the inferior clergy.

Note 7. P. 61. last line. '*or neglect.*'

THE phrases alluded to are, *Multi omnis ætatis, omnis ordinis, utriusque sexus etiam vocantur in periculum et vocabuntur.* Again, '*Neque civitates tantum, sed vicos etiam*

* Allg. Gesch. I. 1. p. 121.

† See Jer. Coll. Eccl. Hist. of Britain, Vol. I. p. 12.

‡ De Excid. Brit. in Biblioth. Pat. t. III. col. 580.

§ The slow progress of the Gospel in Gaul is observed by Gibbon, chap. XV. where he is describing its propagation.

|| Vol. I. l. ix. 6. p. 394.

atque agros superstitionis istius contagio pervagata est.' Again, 'Certe satis constat prope jam desolata templa cœpisse celebrari, et sacra solemnia diu intermissa repeti, passimque venire victimas, quarum adhuc rarissimus emptor inveniebatur *.'

Note 8. P. 62. line 4.

Visa est mihi res consultatione digna, maxime propter periclitantium numerum? Pliny's conduct as to the Christians has been much canvassed. Lardner's chapter † is acute and very interesting. But Gibbon still thinks Pliny showed no bigotry in his language or his proceedings. If Pliny had been a Christian, and the people Pagans, perhaps the historian would have judged differently. Perhaps it would be fair to say, that Lardner should have made a little more allowance for circumstances, ignorance, heathen education, &c. &c. I speak only of Pliny's general temper.

Note 9. P. 62. line 10. '*Of a century.*'

I HAVE already spoken of this testimony of Lucian, who lived in the time of Commodus, A.D. 180. 'Ἀθεῶν ἐμπεπλησθαι καὶ Χριστιανῶν τὸν Πόντον, &c. ‡. The production of such hacknied citations almost requires an apology.

Note 10. P. 63. line 6. '*Of his persecution.*'

GIBBON wishes to argue that as the phrase of Tacitus § in speaking of the number of Christians at Rome, is

* Plin. Epp. Lib. X. Ep. 97.

† The ninth of his Jewish and Heathen Testimonies.

‡ Pseudom, § 25.

§ See next note.

very much like that used by Livy when speaking of the Bacchanals, and that as 7000 were considered as a very large number in the one case, it may fairly be assumed as correct in the other. Nothing surely can be more vague than such calculations, but would not the historian feel any wonder at finding 7000 Christians at Rome at so early a period?

The same clause contains another specimen of the same style of calculation. It appears from Chrysostom * that in the time of Theodosius, when the Christian Church at Antioch consisted of 100,000, 3000 poor were supported by the public oblations. Hence, as it appears from Euseb. VI. 4. 3., that in the middle of the third century, 1500 were supported at Rome in the same way, he calculates the Christians at 50,000. It will be observed first, that to reason from Antioch to Rome, (in short to reason without a larger induction on such a point) can never lead to truth. Besides, the times of comparison differ by above a century. How impossible is it then to know whether a change of manners in the Christians may not have increased the number of those supported by public contributions. Imagine a calculation of the population in England in 1800, the data being the population in 1700, and the number of persons supported by the poor's rates in both cases. The evident and early importance of the Roman See is quite enough to overturn such a calculation.

Note 11. P. 63. line 22. '*Burst upon them.*'

INGENS multitudo is the expression used by Tacitus to describe the Christians at Rome in Nero's time †.

* Opp. T. vii. p. 658. 810.

† See Ann. xv. 44.

Note 12. P. 64. line 7. ‘*Fruitful parent.*’

It has been said that St. Mark was the founder of the Church of Alexandria. Neander observes *, that ‘among the early and zealous preachers of the Gospel, we discover men of Alexandrian education, as Apollos, and, probably, also Barnabas from Cyprus. The Epistle to the Hebrews, that ascribed to Barnabas, the Gospel *κατ’ Αιγυπτίους*, in which we can trace the Alexandrian Theosophic taste; and the Gnosis in the early part of the second century are proofs of the influence which Christianity had very early on the Alexandrian Jewish mode of thinking. With respect to the catechetical school of Alexandria, see Mosheim de Rebus, &c. Sæc. II. §. 25. I know the great tendency to explain away all testimonies alleged on the Christian side of the question, as exaggeration, rhetorical flourish, &c. &c., but I think it would be difficult for the candid reader of Adrian’s letter to his brother-in-law, Servianus, preserved by Vopiscus in Saturnino, c. 7 and 8., and justly called by Neander † a remarkable letter, to deny that that letter proves the existence of a large body of Christians in Egypt at that time, A.D. 134. ‘*Illi qui Serapim Colunt, Christiani sunt; et devoti sunt Serapi qui se Christi Episcopus dicunt.*’

Note 13. P. 64. line 7. ‘*Were Christians.*’ (*Carthage.*)

THE passage here alluded to is found in Tertullian ‡, who says, ‘*Quid ipsa Carthago passura est decimanda a te, &c.*’ The expression is probably rhetorical, but the argument in

* Allg. Gesch. I. 1. p. 116.

† P. 150.

‡ Ad. Scap. 5.

the whole passage is the impossibility of punishing a body so *numerous* as the Christians.

Note 14. P. 64. line 15. ‘ *Various cities of the coast.*’

SEE Bishop Munter’s *Primordia Ecclesiæ Africanæ*, c. 8, 9, 10, 11.

Note 15. P. 64. line 19.

GIBBON mentions 400. See Vol, II. p. 237. 4to edit.

Note 16. P. 65. line 3.

THESE are Gibbon’s words in Chapter xv. at the part marked ‘ Historical view of the progress of Christianity.’

Note 17. P. 66. line 3. ‘ *Nearly disappeared.*’

GIBBON says, that ‘ so rapid, yet so gentle was the fall of Paganism, that only 28 years after the death of Theodosius, the faint and minute vestiges were no longer visible to the eye of the legislator.’ His note is ‘ *Paganos qui supersunt, quanquam jam nullos esse credamus, &c. Cod. Theodos. l. xvi. tit. x. leg. 22. A.D. 423.*’ He adds, however, that the younger Theodosius was afterwards satisfied that his judgment had been somewhat premature *.

This chapter is worthy of a very attentive perusal, for all the writer’s great talents and ingenuity cannot cover the improbability of the statements which he is compelled by his theory to present. His great aim is, for obvious reasons, to represent Christianity not only as a minority, but as a

* Gibbon, vol. iii. p. 93. ch. 28. 4to. edit.

totally contemptible minority. We have seen, for instance, that at Rome in the middle of the third century, he has insisted it was only one-twentieth of the population, and a very little afterwards, by one of his singular calculations, he has made out that this is a true proportion for the whole empire * at the time of Constantine's conversion. What a strange state of things, when nineteen-twentieths of the world submit to persecuting edicts issued by the remaining one-twentieth. In complaining of that persecution, Gibbon observes, that the persecution of Christianity by Paganism was a different thing, for the ' unjust suspicions which were entertained of a dark and dangerous faction, were in some measure countenanced by the inseparable union and *rapid conquests* of the Catholic Church.' How can he call conquests, which at the end of three centuries amounted only to one-twentieth of the population, rapid? But he goes on; ' The same excuses of fear and ignorance cannot be applied to the Christian emperors, who violated the precepts of humanity and of the Gospel. The experience of ages had betrayed the weakness as well as the folly of Paganism; the light of reason and of faith had already exposed to the greatest part of mankind, the vanity of idols; and the declining sect, which still adhered to their worship, might

* I say *singular* calculations, for after stating, that at Rome the population was one-twentieth, and at Antioch one-fifth, he says, that ' the most favourable calculation that can be deduced from the examples of Antioch and of Rome, will not permit us to imagine that more than one-twentieth of the subjects of the Roman empire had enlisted themselves, &c. &c.' Ch. xv. If he means to include the barbarous parts of the empire, the calculation may, indeed, be true, but that is not hinted at; and, undoubtedly, when he speaks of Rome and of Antioch, one is led to think of the civilized portions. Then his calculation is unfair on the face of it, and if we look at the evidence as to Asia Minor and Africa, it is quite against probability. M. Matter says, one fifth instead of one-twentieth (Hist. Univ. vol. i. p. 120.). See Ch. xxvii. for the state of *Milan*, which, I suppose, may be some guide for other cities in the North of Italy.

have been permitted to enjoy, in peace and obscurity, the religious customs of their ancestors.' What is meant by weakness here, I do not comprehend. History proves that the Pagan populace were very frequently, nay, one may say, uniformly, ready and anxious to persecute and torture Christians, and that the emperors had difficulty in restraining them from running into disorder on this point. They shewed, for example, no weakness, either physical or moral, at Lyons. If, therefore, they were still so much superior in numbers, they were surely to be feared.

But how were they a declining sect? A few pages back the historian says, they had a majority in the senate at Rome, and calls Ambrose absurd for saying the contrary. And a very little before that, they had been nineteen-twentieths of the whole population. The historian himself allows *, that Paganism was tolerated and publicly exercised, not only under Constantine, but 'during the whole reign of his sons.'

I must add, in conclusion, that Gibbon's statement of the Christians being only one-twentieth of the population, appears to me very inconsistent with Maximin's letter, in which he declares that Dioclesian and Maximian had observed, 'that almost all mankind were going over to the sect of Christians.' After every allowance for exaggeration, we must remember that it is not exaggeration, but gross absurdity to make an entirely contemptible minority into an overwhelming majority.

Dr. Hey observes, that 'on what motives Constantine embraced Christianity, we may not perfectly know; we are sure he dared to embrace it, and he probably thought, that

* Vol. ii. p. 305 and 308.

in the whole empire taken together, the superior force was on the side of Christianity, taking numbers and steadiness, and other principles into consideration, which would be productive of fidelity; the empire was less likely to be divided if he put himself at the head of the Christian party, than if he followed any other plan *.' Neander says, that 'it is difficult to explain Constantine's conversion on political grounds. If he saved the Christian party, he lost the Pagan, and the Pagan party was, if not the most numerous, yet, then still greatly in possession of power †.'

Note 18. P. 69. l. 10. '*The European world.*'

In the words of Gibbon, 'the invasion of the Huns precipitated on the provinces of the West the Gothic nation, which advanced in less than forty years from the Danube to the Atlantic, and opened a way by the success of their arms to the inroads of so many hostile tribes more savage than themselves.' Chap. xxvi. In this chapter, Gibbon shews how the Chinese conquest of the Huns led them to leave their native seats, to fight and conquer the Goths, and to force them first on the extremities, and then on the heart of the Roman empire.

Note 19. P. 69. line 20. '*Of the worse.*'

I WOULD beg to refer to Mr. Hallam's History of the Middle Ages, chap. ix. part i. See some excellent remarks in Millar's Philosophy of Modern History, vol. i. p. 193.

* Lectures, B. i. ch. xviii. §. 15.

† Allg. Gesch. II. 1. p. 19.

Note 20. P. 70. line 1. ‘*The clergy.*’

I ALLUDE especially to the better class of the Monks. See Mr. Hallam, *ubi supra*, p. 336. 3d edit. On the ignorance of the laity, see p. 329. On the decay of learning in the latter part of the Roman empire, see Millar’s *Lectures*, vol. i. p. 195.

Note 21. P. 70. line 4. ‘*Distant fortress.*’

SEE Mr. Hallam, *ubi supra*, p. 369. and ch. ix. pt. ii. p. 416 and following. Gibbon, vol. iii. p. 277. 4to. I would refer generally also to the conclusion of Fleury’s *Mœurs des Chrétiens*, for a very excellent view of the manners of the middle ages.

Note 22. P. 72. line 15. ‘*From Africa.*’

Note 23. P. 72. line 19. ‘*Of the crescent.*’

‘WHILE the Eastern Church was but a bad theatre for the exhibition and collision of rival schisms and heresies, the Western Church, however practically corrupt and superstitious (a defection for which it is to receive its punishment in kind), in all the great fundamentals of doctrine, had preserved its Christianity in substance Catholic. The contrast is marked in the hour of providential retribution: as the former community then reaped the full recompence of its infidelity, so the latter received the due reward of its faithfulness. Heretical Asia was swallowed up as in a moment by the Unitarian deluge; but Catholic Europe, safe under the shadow of her golden candlestick, sustained the Moslem storm uninjured and unmoved. The tempest broke with

resistless force over the Churches of Syria and Palestine, having inundated Egypt, the cradle of false doctrines, it swept, without a pause, along the continent of Africa, laid in ruin its altars, long polluted by the schism of the Donatists, and by the Vandal heretics *.'

Mr. Foster quotes on this subject Fuller's striking phrase, 'The sins of the Eastern countries, and chiefly their damnable heresies, hastened God's judgments upon them. In these Western parts, heresies, like an angle, caught single persons, which in Asia, like a drag-net, took whole provinces †.'

Among the causes of the success of Mahomet, Fabricius mentions, '*inter Christianos ipsos jampridem degenerantes a prima puritate, multitudine hæresium ac dissidiorum, et vita parum digna Christianis, cultus adolescens imaginum et sanctorum ‡.*' His preceding chapter, in which he gives a fuller account of the threat of withdrawing the candlestick, and its accomplishment, is well worth reading.

Dr. Millar notices the schisms and the profligacy of the Africans, as causes tending to the more easy subversion of Christianity §.

Law observes, that the general disposition of a people will considerably affect their views of religion, that they that are impure, will defile it, corrupt it with impious fables and absurd traditions, or turn it into licentiousness and carnal polity, as was the case under the Roman empire. 'Thus,' he adds, 'did the Eastern nations, and were overwhelmed with Mahometanism, and thus did a great part of Africa ||.'

* Mahometanism Unveiled, vol. i. Introd. p. 84.

† Holy Warre, book I. chap. 6.

‡ Lux. Ev. chap. 25. p. 493.

§ Lectures, vol. I. p. 248.

|| Theory of Religion, p. 35.

Note 24. P. 75. line 4. ‘*only by degrees.*’

THIS subject is treated very admirably by Dr. Millar, in his ‘Lectures on the Philosophy of Modern History *.’

Note 25. P. 75. line 20. ‘*entire indifference.*’

I REFER especially to Clovis. ‘It would be a fruitless inquiry,’ says Mr. Hallam, ‘whether he was sincere in his change.’

Note 26. P. 76. line 14. ‘*they served.*’

SEE the extract from Mr. Hallam, in Note 29. ‘The ignorance of the laity compelled the clergy to prosecute all kinds of studies. The first abbots of Clugni, were the most learned men of the times; and their erudition caused them to be sought after by the bishops, the popes, and even by princes. All the world consulted them, and they could not avoid taking part in the most important affairs of church and state †.

Note 26*. P. 75. last line. ‘*uncultivated adherents.*’

‘THE religion by which they were addressed was not pure, the motive which prompted the appeal was interested and ambitious; but still the language was that of a power interested in the general maintenance of peace, because its

* Lect. IV. vol. I. p. 197—215.

† Fleury’s Disc. (in Jortin’s Discourses, vol. III. p. 288. ed. 1805.)

authority was founded on another basis than military power*.'

Note 27. P. 76. line 23. '*hushed the din of arms.*'

EVEN Mr. Hallam is moved to some commendation of the Church on these points. 'We can hardly regret,' says he, 'in reflecting on the desolating violence which prevailed, that there should have been some green spots in the wilderness, where the feeble and the persecuted could find refuge. How must this rite have enhanced the veneration for religious institutions! How gladly must the victims of internal warfare, have turned their eyes from the baronial castle, the dread and scourge of the neighbourhood, to those venerable walls, within which not even the clamour of arms could be heard, to disturb the chant of holy men, and the sacred service of the Altar! The protection of a sanctuary was never withheld †.' See too Southey's *Book of the Church*, vol. i. p. 285. On the Truce of God, see Southey's *Book of the Church*, vol. i. p. 286. Robertson's *Charles V.* vol. i. note 21. *Abrege Chronol.* tom. iii. p. 34. Millar's *Lectures*, vol. i. p. 299, and note.—We may add, that the clergy were active against slavery (Millar's *Lectures*, vol. i. p. 519. Hallam, vol. i. p. 220. though, as usual, with a sneer;) we find councils (as that of Tours in 567) enforcing on the community the duty of maintaining the poor; and again (as that at Mâcon in 585) anathematizing any great men who might deprive the poor of their houses. On the encouragement of agriculture, and the reclamation of

* Millar's *Lectures*, vol. I p. 299. See too Dr. Chandler's sixth Bampton Lecture. Southey's *Book of the Church*, vol. I. p. 58.

† *Middle Ages*, vol. iii. p. 357. 3d ed.

waste lands by the monasteries, see Millar's Note (from Sir F. Eden on the Poor, vol. i. p. 50.) vol. i. p. 327. Hallam, vol. iii. p. 436. Southey's Book of the Church, vol. i. p. 61 and 62.

Note 28. P. 77. line 4.

SOUTHEY's Book of the Church, vol. i. p. 98. The historian is speaking of Christianity even as corrupted by the Roman Church.

Note 29. P. 78. line 1. '*which learning gave her.*'

THE reader will find in M. Matter's Histoire Univ. vol. i. p. 436, and following, a sufficient account and abstract of the endeavours of various councils, from the third to the seventh century, to correct the faults of the clergy. Other councils were equally strenuous in enforcing the necessity of learning.

'The bishops acquired and retained a great part of their ascendancy by a very respectable instrument of power, intellectual superiority. They alone were acquainted with the art of writing; they were naturally intrusted with political correspondence, and with the framing of the laws. They alone knew the elements of a few sciences; the education of royal families devolved on them as a necessary duty. In the fall of Rome, their influence upon the barbarians wore down the asperities of conquest, and saved the provincials half the shock of that tremendous revolution. As captive Greece is said to have subdued her Roman conqueror, so Rome, in her own turn of servitude, cast the fetters of a moral captivity on the fierce invaders of the North. Chiefly through the exertions of the bishops, whose

ambition may be forgiven for its effects, her religion, her language, and, in part, even her laws, were transplanted into the courts of Paris and Toledo, which became a degree less barbarous by imitation *.'

Jortin has pointed out some of the advantages gained by the cause of literature from Christianity.

The Christians, says he, collected and preserved the ancient versions of the Old Testament, especially the LXX—preserved the works of Josephus, to them were due the Herapla.

The study of Scripture led the Christians to pursue chronology, history, and astronomy,

The New Testament being in Greek, led Christians to apply much to the study of that splendid language.

The opposition of Jews and Pagans led the Christians to the study of Jewish and Pagan literature, especially the latter, or what is called classical learning.

The Fathers, till the third century, were generally Greek writers. Latin declined in that century, but the Christians preserved it from barbarism. In the second and third century the Christian fathers are not at all inferior to the Pagan writers of the same time. And in the fourth and fifth centuries were very many fair, and some excellent writers.

In the sixth century lived Boethius, who might deserve a place even amongst classic authors.

During the dark ages, the Church produced very many learned men, as Alcuin in the eighth century, Photius in the ninth, Bruno in the tenth, and subsequently Eustathius of Thessalonica, Cinnamus, Zonaras, Anna Comnena, William of Malmesbury, Abelard, Saxo Grammaticus, Roger Bacon, &c. &c.

* Hallam, vol. ii. p. 216. 3d ed.

‘Without Christianity, it is extremely probable that the Latin and Greek tongues would have been lost in the revolutions of the empire, and the irruptions of barbarians in the East and West; for the old inhabitants would have had no religious and conscientious motives to keep up their languages. And then, together with the Latin and Greek tongues, the knowledge of antiquities and the ancient writers would have been destroyed. You may see something of this kind in the present state of Africa, where the Latin tongue is absolutely unknown, though in the 5th century it was spoken there as in Italy *.’

This is worth considering, as Jortin was the last person to exalt the character of the Church and the clergy on any point improperly. And this may, therefore, be set against Mr. Hallam’s charges against the Church, on the point of literature †. Indeed, that writer’s desire to inculcate the Church and the clergy, frequently leads him to oversights hardly pardonable in an historian. He mentions Alfred’s complaint of the ignorance of the clergy, but he does not tell us that the greater part of that ignorance was caused by the destruction of the monasteries by the Danes, and that to repair the evil, Alfred sent for monks from France ‡.

Note 30. P. 78. line 7. ‘*civilization.*’

HALLAM, vol. iii. p. 335. 3d edit.

Note 31. P. 78. line 15. ‘*a better order of things.*’

FLEURY, in the Discourse on Ecclesiastical History from

* Jortin’s First Charge. Vol. vii. of his Sermons, 3d edit. p. 361—371.

† Vol. iii. p. 309—311.

‡ See Southey’s Book of the Church, vol. i. p. 87.

A.D. 600 to A.D. 1100, translated by Jortin *, has shewn the benefits of monasteries in these respects.

Note 32. P. 78. line 20. *‘for learning itself.’*

‘DURING the ignorance of those days of violence, the literary treasures of antiquity were preserved in their (the monastic) libraries, and some imperfect knowledge of them cherished by the studies of their members †.’

‘The monasteries were subjected to strict rules of discipline, and held out, at the worst, more opportunities for study than the secular clergy possessed, and fewer for worldly dissipation. But their most important service was as secure repositories for books. All our MSS. have been preserved to us in this manner, and could hardly have descended to us by any other channel, at least there were intervals when I do not conceive that any royal or private libraries existed ‡.’

The same points are very strongly put by Fleury in one of his Discourses on Ecclesiastical History. See the translation in Jortin’s Discourses, &c. vol. iii. p. 285 and foll. ed. 1825.

‘The monks were occupied in transcribing books; and though they preserved many homilies and theological tracts of the later fathers, which we could well have spared, and neglected some valuable authors whose loss we deplore, yet they transmitted to us those Latin and Greek classics which we now possess, and which would have perished had it not been for their labours, and for the libraries contained in

* Vol. iii. p. 250—296.

† Millar’s Lectures, vol. i. p. 303.

‡ Hallam’s Middle Ages, vol. iii. p. 337.

their monasteries. To them we owe copies of the Roman laws, of the Theodosian and Justinian codes; and the Roman laws being adopted more or less in Christian nations, and the study of them being honourable and profitable, conduced greatly to the preservation of literature in general, and the Latin language in particular *.

Note 33. P. 79. line 1. '*genuine Christianity.*'

SEE Mr. Hallam's admissions as to the schoolmen and the scholastic philosophy †.

The reader will find in the abridgement of Brucker, (p. 492—530,) some useful information on the state of philosophy from the twelfth to the fifteenth century, and on the schoolmen in particular.

Note 34. P. 80. line 1. '*that investigation revealed.*'

TAKE as instances St. Bernard, Thomas a Kempis, and the venerable Bede.

* Jortin's First Charge. Sermons, vol. vii. p. 369.

† Vol. iii. p. 533 and 538.

CHAPTER IV.

Note 1. P. 82. line 8. ‘*of a fourth.*’

ACCORDING to Balbi's tables, the population of the world is 737,000,000 and of these, according to the same tables, about 260,000,000 are Christians, i. e. considerably *above* a fourth. In a table, published in some of the periodical works, a year or two ago, and translated from the German, the population is made to be 828,000,000, and the Christians only 234,495,000. This, however, is still above a fourth. I subjoin the table, though I do not profess to know on what authorities it is founded; and, indeed, I cannot but conceive it to be inaccurate in some respects. I have seen, for example, the Jews stated to be nearer eight than two millions; and I have also seen a statement that the Sunnite Mahometans do not much exceed 20 millions; an older writer * makes Christianity possess not above one-sixth of the world. He says, that out of 30 parts, 5 are Christian, 6 Mahometan, and 19 Pagan. But if either of the above tables be correct, the number of Mahometans is not nearly equal that of Christians. In the tables here given, they are not as many by one-half. And from Balbi it seems, that, besides the Mahometans in British India, there are, at most, not 90,000,000 Mahometans. The

* As Brerewood, *Inquiries into the Diversity of Languages*, chap. XIV. p. 203.

whole population of British India is given at 114,430,000, in these tables.

Population of the earth (as to religion).

A. Monotheists	362,045,000
I. Christians	234,495,000
(1) Catholics	129,550,000
(2) Protestants	57,694,000
(a) Evangelic (united)	8,200,000
(b) Lutheran	16,220,000
(c) Reformed	12,240,000
(a) Proper Reformed	7,440,000
(b) Presbyterians	4,800,000
(d) Anglican	15,050,000
(e) Various sects	5,984,000
(a) Independents	3,800,000
(b) Methodists	1,500,000
(c) Quakers	200,000
(d) Memnonites	200,000
(e) Hernhutters	100,000
(f) Baptists ,	76,000
(g) Unitarians	60,000
(h) Swedenborgians	36,000
(i) Filippines	12,000
(3) Greek Christians	41,375,000
(a) Russia Greek	35,375,000
(b) Eastern Greek	6,000,000
(4) Monophysites	5,876,000
(a) Jacobites	3,526,000
(a) Proper Jacobites	220,000
(b) Copts	3,200,000

(c) Thomas Christians . .	80,000
(d) John Christians . .	26,000
(b) Maronites	150,000
(c) Armenians	2,200,000
(5) Nestorians	400,000
II. Jews	2,650,000
III. Mahometans	115,120,000
(1) Sunnites	72,000,000
(a) Proper Sunnites . .	65,000,000
(b) Wahabites	7,000,000
(2) Schiites	43,000,000
(3) Ismaelites	120,000
IV. Zoroastrians	780,000
V. Confucians	5,000,000
VI. Nankinists	4,000,000
B. Polytheists	.
(1) Lamaïtes	58,000,000
(2) Brahmins	115,000,000
(3) Buddhists	169,000,000
(4) Fetiche-worshippers . . .	124,000,000
828 millions.	

Note 2.

IT is abundantly clear, that Christianity was co-extensive with civilization, at the end of the third century. Its progress, afterwards, was something of this kind. During the fourth century, it was completing its triumphs over Paganism in the Old World. After this period, we begin to find the effects of the admixture of the barbarians, in the greater slowness and difficulty of conversions, from the constant state of warfare in which the world was engaged,

the destruction of civilization, the interruption of communication, and the moral difficulty of producing an impression on uncivilized men. During the fifth century, the Burgundians, and the Franks under Clovis, were certainly converted; and there seems good ground for supposing, that Ireland was, during this century, Christianized*. Christianity, however, was overwhelmed in England, by the irruption of barbarians; and we find, accordingly, that in the sixth century, a part of the Anglo-Saxons, the Picts and Scots, and in the East, the Armenians, and some neighbouring people, were added to the list of Christian nations. During the seventh century, the remainder of the Anglo-Saxons, the Northern Germans, with the inhabitants of Westphalia, and Switzerland; in the eighth, the rest of the Germans; in the ninth, the Danes and Swedes, with some parts of the Poles, Bohemians, Moravians, Huns and Bulgarians; in the tenth, the Muscovites and the remainder of the Poles, and part of the Hungarians; in the eleventh, the rest of Hungary; in the twelfth, Pomerania, Livonia, Norway and Finland were converted. The reader will find many particulars, and ample references, with respect to the singular history of the conversion of Germany, in the nineteenth chapter of Fabricius's *Lux Evangelii*; and chapters 21—24, supply information with respect to the east and north of Europe. On the conquest and conversion of Prussia, see the chapter on the religious orders of knighthood, (the 31st,) p. 547.

I am compelled, very reluctantly, by want of space, to omit all inquiry into the progress of Christianity in Asia and Africa. The former deserves especial attention. Fabricius

* See Neander, *Allg. Gesch.* II. p. 1. pp. 259, and following.

has given us ample materials for studying this subject, as well as the history of missions in chapters 32—46.

In Leo Sapiens's Notitia, which is referred to A.D. 891, we have a list of about 1800 episcopal sees. Of the extent of these it would be absurd to speak generally; but we may mention, that in the diocese of Egypt, (where there were, in Augustine's time, 466 bishopricks,) that of Hippo was 40 miles long. The authorities for these statements will be found in F. Spanheim's Introductio; and in Bingham, book IX. chap. I.

Note 3. P. 87. line 17. '*which Christianity has made.*'

IN a missionary point of view, it is hardly possible to estimate too highly the advantages of having so large a body of Christians speaking the same language as ourselves. With England and America, heartily united in that cause, what may not be achieved! On the progress of Christianity in America, see Fabricius, p. 603, and chapters 48 and 49.

Note 4. P. 88. line 3. '*from the Gospel.*'

I NEED only refer to Mr. Forster's Mahomedanism Unveiled.

Note 5. P. 88. line 23. '*a wider sway.*'

THERE is ample proof that Protestantism is gaining ground in France; and they who have attended to the progress of things in Roman Catholic Germany, are aware, that the religion of the Romanists is already wearing an aspect there, little pleasing to the See of Rome.

Note 6. P. 89. line 21. '*grapple with it at all.*'

' THROUGH the whole order of creation, and the whole scheme of Providence, we observe marks of a progressive advancement, and a gradual discovery of truth. In all the operations of the human mind, in the important discoveries of art, and the improvements of laws and governments, we go on step by step, as leisure and opportunities offer, or new wants are created, until, at last, we have completely filled up the first rude outline, which necessity suggested. A similar progress is to be observed in the higher and more valuable truths of religion; and God Almighty, in mercy and love to his creatures, seems always to have proportioned his discoveries, not only to the actual wants of mankind, but to their capacity of receiving truth themselves, and their means of communicating it to others *.'

' I am far from imagining that *Christianity* is yet come to its mature state; that it is understood in the whole extent, or held in its utmost purity and perfection by any one church. But, as when it was first preached, men were fit to hear, and profit by it, in a competent degree, as that was a proper time to divulge it, in order to improve the world, which it did very considerably, excelling all former dispensations, refining the conceptions, even of those who did not formally receive it, and yet was itself, for some time, but partially communicated, and imperfectly understood, so now it is of much greater advantage to the world in general, and yet still capable of increase; it waits for its own *fulness*; nor shall mankind receive the proper influence of it, till their minds be much farther opened and enlarged, their reason

* Hall's Bampton Lectures, p. 17.

more freely exercised, in this great mystery of Divine love *.'

Note 7. P. 97. line 8. '*for shame.*'

SEE Mr. Ward's View of the History, &c. of the Hindoos, vol. I., Introductory Remarks, p. xii., and Preface to vol. III. p. xxxix. On the morality of the Hindoos, see vol. III. p. 286—313.

Note 8. P. 98. line 25. '*could effect.*'

IT is impossible to give any satisfactory view of this matter in the limits of a note. I would refer to Leland's Advantages of Christianity, especially, on this point.

Note 9. P. 99. line 12. '*of the Gospel.*'

THE benefits conferred by the Gospel have been enumerated by many writers. The following observations may deserve consideration.

'The existence of such a rule' (as the Christian) 'and far more the existence of persons urging it, has a general influence extending even to those who might seem removed beyond its reach. In this way, a general improvement of habits has followed the progressive diffusion of the Gospel †.'

Through Christianity, 'The inhuman sports of the Roman amphitheatre were gradually discontinued; the most savage features of war have been softened; crimes of particular heinousness have become disgraceful in general opinion; the female sex has been raised to its just level in society; the duty of benevolence has been more commonly

* Law's Theory of Religion, p. 208, 9.

† Sumner.

recognized and practised ; the severity of parental rule has been controlled ; infanticide abolished ; the system of domestic slavery has ceased * ;' a matter of no small moment, when we remember the extreme cruelty practised by the Romans, especially, to their slaves †.

Comparing the present with earlier times, Worthington observes ‡, ' that we have not now such monstrous and disgusting heresies and practices as were exhibited by the Gnostics § and other heretics of the early ages ; that where early heresies have been revived, they have died away at once, or have been proposed in less obnoxious forms ; that Popery begins to be ashamed of some of its grosser errors ; and its divines, of late, have been' (I presume he alludes, especially, to Bossuet's Exposition,) ' forced to explain them in a manner more agreeable to truth and Scripture ; that controversy, in the present day, has lost some of the dreadful bitterness which it once had ; and that, in Protestant countries, at least, as well as many Roman Catholic ones, there is a general toleration for men to worship God in their own way, without being persecuted for it.' He subsequently notices the statements made against Christianity, viz. that the ancient heathens, the present Mahometans, the Chinese, and even the wild Indians are better than the generality of Christians, and very properly denies the truth of these statements ||. I have already observed, that many of these statements are the declamatory arguments of Christian writers, endeavouring to shame Christians into a better

* Sumner.

† See Jortin on the Truth of the Christian Religion, p. 134, note, 2d edition.

‡ Essay, chap. VII.

§ For a full account of these heretics, I would refer the reader to Professor Burton's learned and elaborate Bampton Lectures for the last year.

|| So M'Knight, on the Truth of the Gospel, p. 49.

way of life, by contrasting the vices of their practices with the purity of their profession*. But, in good truth, the matter will not bear an argument. Let the reader look to the statements made respecting the corruptions of the ancient heathen world, and of the Chinese and Mahometans in the 'Cure of Deism,' vol. I. p. 108. ; or in Leland's *Advantages, &c.* vol. II. chapters i—xiii. (and especially chap. iv.) and respecting those of the present heathen world, in the abstract of Millar's *Propagation of Christianity*, given by Bishop Gibson, in his second Pastoral Letter, and after making what allowances he pleases, he cannot but see the absurdity of denying, that the Christian world, with all its vices, is far better than the heathen. As Bishop Gibson says, the destroying idolatry, with all its attendant impurities of worship and practice, and the establishing a pure form of worship, with good moral instruction, is an unspeakable benefit, nor can any candid man deny that to these means is to be attributed the cessation of many of the cruelties and abominations commonly practised in earlier times, and even defended and recommended by philosophers. He adds, with equal justice, that although the world is bad enough even with the controul of Christianity, it would be far worse without that controul; that the commission of excesses is less frequent and more shameful among Christians than Heathens; and that it is, in some degree redeemed by the extraordinary piety and purity of many Christians in every Christian country. I would beg to refer also to Fawcett's *Sermon on Matt. x. 34*†, for a very pleasing view of this subject.

M^r Knight (in his admirable work on the Truth of the

* No one, perhaps, has gone to a greater length than Bishop Fowler, in his *Design of Christianity*, sect. III. chap. XVI.

† *Sermons*, p. 73—108.

Gospel,) has shewn with great force the inestimable value of Christian education and instruction, observing, that now the poorest Christians have higher and better notions of God, his attributes, a future state, and of moral obligation, than the greatest geniuses among the Heathen world. He adds, with great truth, that even the professed enemies of the Gospel derive improvement from it; for their best notions on moral subjects are, in fact, taken from the Gospel, or have been modified by it. Worthington has observed, very rightly, that the heathen philosophers taught a far purer morality *after* the coming of the Gospel than before, and became ashamed of their idolatry and gross corruption. A curious instance of this, by the way, is afforded by the anxious care of Julian to improve and amend the profession and practice of that Paganism, which he preferred to the Gospel*.

In conclusion, it may be observed with M'Knight (in substance) that they who look to public life only for the beneficial effects of Christianity, do wrong; for the virtues which it most endeavours to spread and recommend, are virtues which must be cultivated and practised in silence and retirement. Self-denial, self-abasement, kind thoughts, charity, purity of desires and thoughts, these and many others, are graces exercised mainly in private, and only showing their effects indirectly on society.

Jortin† observes, 'that the corruptions of the Christian world were foreseen and foretold by Christ and his apostles,' which shews at least, that they were not mistaken, and did not expect that more benefit should arise from the Gospel than hath really been produced.

* See Julian Opp. p. 429. (Ess. 49.) and fragm. p. 288.

† In his First Charge, Sermons, vol. VII. p. 359. 3d edit.

Mr. Forster refers to the testimony of Gibbon *; adding, that ‘the religion which could extort concessions like these from Mr. Gibbon’s very imperfect sense of justice and fairness, has little to apprehend from the shafts of his scepticism.’

The reader will find a full view of the subject also in Dr. Brown’s Comparative View of Christianity, vol. II. pt. 4. ch. iv. and in Dr. Chandler’s Bampton Lectures, Lecture IV.

Note 10. P. 101. line 4. ‘*of more favoured nations.*’

‘Is not the likelihood every day increasing, that the extirpation of Heathenism throughout North America, will be completed only with the gradual decay and extinction of the remaining native tribes †?’

Note 11. P. 101. last line. ‘*of the pure light.*’

IN the Hindoo systems, spiritually and philosophically considered, as we are taught that some of the better and more enlightened Indians consider it, there may perhaps be somewhat to elevate the mind. See Mr. Ward’s view of it in the preface to his third volume. Brucker’s is superficial.

Note 12. P. 102. line 8. ‘*conversion of the world.*’

WITH respect to the conversion of the Mahometans, I would direct the reader to the conclusion of Mr. Forster’s ‡ work on Mahometanism, and to Professor Lee’s preface to his publication of Martyn’s tracts in controversy with the Mahometans in Persia.

* Vol. VI. p. 154, 275–277, and vol. X. p. 242–245. 8vo. edit

† Foster’s Mahometanism, vol. II. p. 520.

‡ Vol. II. p. 361–380.

Note 13. P. 104. line 2.

I recommend the preface to vol. III. of Mr. Ward's work on the Hindoos, as setting in a very striking point of view our duties to Hindostan.

Note 14. P. 104. line 20. '*into dust.*'

THIS phrase is, I believe, De Maistre's, in his Soirees de St. Petersbourg.

THE END.



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